

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN STUDENT VOICE RIVER FALLS

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UW-River Falls Falcon Felines Back in Session

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First established by the capstone class ANSC 421 (Advanced Canine and Feline Care & Management), cooperation between the Dunn County Humane Society and the UWRF Falcon Felines has allowed North Hall to house its campus Cat Colony since the spring semester of 2023.

Now, almost two years later, it has undergone an unexpected change: running exclusively by student volunteers.

Falcon Felines has functioned as an on-campus adoption program, fostering cats that are then socialized, decompressed, treated for any medical needs and ultimately introduced to visitors interested in providing forever homes.

Since its launch, the cat colony has been a huge hit on both the UWRF campus and in the River Falls area. Without the necessary personnel to teach ANSC 421 this semester, however, the fate of UWRF's cat colony was grim—until one ambitious student stepped up.

Currently a junior at UWRF on the Companion Animal, pre-veterinary track, Nikki Hoffar learned only a few months ago about the very real possibility of the Cat Colony shutting down.

She first began volunteering with the Cat Colony as a freshman taking ANSC 121, gaining hands-on experience with how much good the colony did for campus. Invested in its continued survival, she remembers thinking to herself, “Why don’t I just run it?”

The program was originally intended to provide hands-on experience with the care, socialization and adoption of the cats welcomed during school semesters. Now, its entire operation would have to rely solely on students. Determined, Hoffar spent the past summer preparing the space and supplies for incoming cats with the close support of university professor Dr. Sylvia Kehoe.

Now that the semester is in full swing, her duties encompass much of what a traditional advisor would have done, such as gathering and training volunteers, maintaining routine communication with Dunn County and providing daily maintenance.

“Basically just running like a manager of a business,” she said, referring to her role.

Hoffar also recalls the difficulty of the first two weeks of the newly reformed Cat Colony, when she spent many hours with the cats as they were first brought in, while also working tirelessly to ensure volunteers not only had access to the colony but were comfortable and capable in their expected duties.

Though supported by the guidance and resources provided by Dr. Kehoe and fellow staff, much of the burden of responsibility fell on Hoffar.

Very quickly, however, the time, effort, and collaboration proved fruitful. During the first adoption day—a set period in time in which people are welcomed to meet and play with the cats—one of the cats, Girlie, went home with her new family. Another cat, Dreamer, is well on her way to follow suit.



Falcon Felines has an 'Adopted Falcons' list of all the cats who have received adoptions throughout the years. (All three photos by Michaleen Lovett)

When asked to comment on the success, Hoffar said things had gone much better than expected. “My goal for the [program],” she said, “was ‘I want to get through as many cats as possible’—which sounds crazy, [but] the more cats I can get through, the better.”

With the combined efforts of the volunteers she manages, along with her own contributions, that goal is well on its way to reality.

Part of what fuels these ambitions is that the Cat Colony's partner, the Dunn County Humane Society, is not only a shelter that accepts all animals it's presented with, but is also a no-kill shelter. By continuing the tradition of the Cat Colony, Hoffar and fellow volunteers can help alleviate the burden of overflow by however many cats they are able to welcome at a time.

In tandem with this, the colony also provides an invaluable advantage for the UWRF itself.

“Where do the Companion Animal kids get their hands-on experience?” Hoffar asked, noting that there are fewer on-campus opportunities for them than those whose concentrations in animal science are tied to the horse farm or dairy plant. “This is a big component of it. It means a lot more people get to be involved for a lot longer.”

Though she had never imagined herself running a cattery, Hoffar has ensured that one of UWRF's pivotal animal programs continues to thrive.

“It's the responsibility of the UWRF family to support these efforts by doing their own part: donating or volunteering if they can, keeping up with the Falcon Feline socials, spreading the word, and, of course, visiting the cats,” she said.



Science and Technology Innovation Center to open January 2026, available for the spring semester

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The University of Wisconsin-River Falls plans to expand its college of Arts and Sciences, as the majors in the program continue to grow. This prompted a project to build a new science hall with more classrooms and equipment to support advanced courses and a growing student body.

Hagsted Hall, a former student center, was torn down in summer of 2023, and the new Science and Technology Innovation Center was built in its place, with construction completed in late 2025. SciTech will open to students in January 2026 and will accommodate numerous spring semester classes.

According to the UW-River Falls website, “SciTech will be a transformational facility, prominently located on the UWRF campus, where students from a wide range of majors will engage in immersive, high-impact learning experiences in biology, chemistry, physics and psychological sciences.”

The newly built center will include 12 instructional labs, 32 undergraduate research spaces, three wet bench research labs and additional facilities. This will advance the science-related majors on campus and expand opportunities for new experiences and expanded research.

According to the FAQ section on the UWRF website, “The state of Wisconsin has provided \$111.73 million of the \$116.73 million needed to complete SciTech. Alumni entrepreneurs Jeff and Kristi Cernohous, ’93, have presented a \$1 million lead gift in support of the project, and UW-River Falls will work to raise the remaining funding through the Campaign to Support SciTech.”

With the construction coming to a close, the goals for the new SciTech building include fostering relationships with STEM businesses and expanding student innovation



The Science and Technology Innovation Center houses a new greenhouse at the rear of the building. This will allow students to study biology and plant cultivation. (Photo by Alison Keeler)

and research.

“SciTech isn’t about a building. It’s about providing immersive high-impact learning experiences and building limitless productive and collaborative opportunities for students, faculty and the regional business community,” the UW-River Falls website said.



Signs on the all doors of SciTech prevent anyone except construction workers from entering. (Photo by Alison)



Inside a science classroom in the new Science and Technology Innovation Center. (Photo by Alison Keeler)



Outdoor yard sign for the new SciTech building. (Photo by Alison Keeler)

Frances Cohler Coffee Concert Series sparks community engagement at UW-River Falls

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Recently, I have had the opportunity to attend the Frances Cohler Coffee Concert. Needless to say, it was a fantastic experience. Aside from the great performance, I felt a sense of calm in contrast to the busyness of campus life. As a matter of fact, it helped me focus on my work even after the concert ended. The thing I didn't know, however, is that this feeling was not an accident. It was intentionally, purposely set up by the founders of the concert series so that average students like myself would find themselves sitting in Abbott Concert Hall on a Friday feeling that sense of relaxation.

After speaking with Dr. Kristin Tjornehoj, retired director of the UW-River Falls Symphony Band and founder of the Frances Cohler Coffee Concert Series, I came to discover the passion behind the concert series and the impact it can have on campus as a whole.

The Frances Cohler Coffee Concert Series originally didn't start as a concert series at all. Rather, it started out as a weekly sectional practice for different parts in the UWRF Symphony Band as a way for students to practice with their sections in an academic environment without having to dedicate time outside of class.

Since Tjornehoj has long been a believer in the idea that physical interaction with performances in turn makes students better performers by giving them a standard to reach, she started inviting professional musicians to perform at these sectionals to provide examples on how to perform.

This all comes to when piano professor Dr. Ivan Konev was performing alongside the Isles Ensemble in Minneapolis, MN. Wanting to hear their concert, Dr. Tjornehoj invited Dr. Konev and the Isles Ensemble to perform on a Friday after band. And since band ended at noon, every performance after would follow in their footsteps, with the Isles Ensemble themselves being recurring performers for the past 6 to 8 years.

"I brought one of the [sectional] groups in— I think there were six to eight people," said Tjornehoj, "and then I started doing it formally and sharing it with others."

Starting out, Tjornehoj was the only one working on the logistics of the Coffee Concert, handling all arrangements to make it as an "enrichment opportunity" for the symphony band, before deciding to open up the performances to the public at around five or six concerts per semester.

Some of the more notable performances apart from the professors of the UWRF Music Program, include Evern Ozel, an international award winning classical pianist raised in Minnesota who has been playing piano since he was 3 years old.

Another is Hans De Jong, who—aside from being one of the best saxophone players in the world—is notable for helping launch the tradition of guest performers playing in UW-River Falls Symphony Band and Orchestra concerts during the same week as their Coffee Concert appearance.

But there was a big hurdle when it came to the Coffee



The graphic features a warm, orange-toned background. At the top, a string of yellow string lights hangs across the width. On the left, there is a brown acoustic guitar. On the right, there is a brown and white coffee cup with the word "Coffee" written on it. In the center, the text "Coffee Concert" is written in a large, black, cursive font, with "2025-2026 Schedule" in a smaller, black, cursive font below it. Below the title, a list of concert events is provided, each starting with a bullet point and a date.

- **September 12** – Ji Young Lee, piano and Saerom Kwon, cello play Schumann, Prokofiev and Piazzolla
- **October 17** – Natalia Moiseeva, violin and Ivan Konev, piano play Beethoven, Brahms and Prokofiev
- **November 14** – Ivan Konev and Ji Young Lee, UWRF Piano Duet and Yakov Kasman, UWRF Keyboard Festival special guest
- **February 6** – Ivan Konev, piano with Minnesota Orchestra members play Smetana Piano Trio
- **February 27** – UWRF Woodwind Faculty Ensemble with Ivan Konev, piano play Mozart Piano & Woodwinds quintet
- **March 13** – Momoko Tanno, soprano and Asako Hirabayashi, harpsichord present Duo Mythos in Early Music concert with Margaret Humphrey, baroque violin and Charles Asch, cello play J.S. Bach, G. F. Handel and Henry Purcell.
- **April 3** – Laura Caviani Jazz trio with Natalia Moiseeva, violin
- **May 1** – Oda Voltersvik (Norway), piano in program "Edvard Grieg in dialogue"

GRAPHIC BY: ALISON KEELER

Concert sticking around; the Coffee Concert Series—to this day—does not have a formal budget from the university. Tjornehoj personally funds the Coffee Concerts alongside the Jerome Family Foundation and financial donations from alumni and the UWRF Foundation.

It was done because of Tjornehoj's core beliefs about the impact music has on students. She believes music is a way for people to come together and make the world better, whether you are playing an instrument or watching a concert. As such, she spent her time at UWRF as a professor finding ways to provide opportunities for students to experience performing arts.

Aside from the Coffee Concert Series, Tjornehoj also helped establish student group rates at the Minnesota Orchestra for music students in the university's bands.

According to her, by making the Coffee Concert Series affordable and accessible on campus, students can easily gain an appreciation for performing arts, support them freely and find a sense of community by gathering with others.

"We live in such a digital age where you can access things online," Tjornehoj stated. "But you aren't creating community unless you're interacting with people. So, it is my view and my mission, if you will, to connect people through music. These concerts are designed to expose anyone to music, and I can guarantee, you can grow personally as well as musically."

The Frances Cohler Coffee Concert Series schedule is available alongside the full performance calendar on the UW-River Falls Music Program website.

Bridging the Divide at UWRF: Having Hard Conversations

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Civil discourse continues as student representatives are being chosen for the *Bridging the Divide* program during the academic year.

According to the Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership, Bridging the Divide is a program brought to the University of Wisconsin System campuses with the purpose of providing a safe and welcoming environment that encourages civil conversation about politically challenging topics between students and faculty.

The program is expanding to multiple UW-system campuses and is run by one student per campus. All students interested in leading conversations at their campus are encouraged to apply through the Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership's website. Selected students receive a full tuition scholarship for the academic year.

The application is annual, and the student chosen does not change unless there is a justified reason for no longer being fit for the role. Hannah Woelfel, a third-year student, won this year's scholarship and was named the representative for the UW-River Falls campus.

Woelfel expressed feelings of doubt and inferiority when deciding to apply for the scholarship. It took the support of those around her to give her the push she really needed to finally apply for the program.

She said that although she has felt nervous since starting, she enjoys the opportunity to show her "Type A" skills and plan for each topic and conversation.

"If it was a perfect world, I would probably do more events. I really enjoy planning it and I enjoy talking to people, and creating that really friendly environment. So, I would do it as many times in a semester as I could."

Woelfel isn't the only student who believes the environment *Bridging the Divide* has provided is insightful. Natasha Swatzina, another a third-year student, said the program is something that all students should be able to experience.

"I really enjoyed the session of *Bridging the Divide* that I attended. It was structured very well and was very easy to understand. Students were given a topic and questions to answer about said topic. This allowed for the conversations to flow naturally. I also felt very comfortable expressing my opinions during that time. I do believe that other schools should do this type of event. It's super easy to attend and be a part of. It's a great way to connect with the community on campus and voice your opinions in a safe and controlled environment."

Woelfel will host the next sessions on Oct. 29 and Nov. 12 at 4:30 p.m. in the University Center's Falls Room. All sessions are free and open for anyone to attend. Free food will also be provided.

According to Woelfel, *Bridging the Divide* holds their students to a high standard to ensure that each session "replaces snark with conversation, tweets with real talk, and scrolls and likes with face-to-face dialogue."

Woelfel said she looks forward to what the year will bring and the new experiences to come along the way.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

a project of **TGT** TOMMY G. THOMPSON
CENTER ON PUBLIC LEADERSHIP
UNIVERSITIES OF WISCONSIN

We replace snark with conversation, tweets with real talk, and scrolls and likes with face-to-face dialogue.

Join us for a discussion
with
FREE pizza and cookies!

When: **October 8th 4:30-6pm**

Where: **Falls Room in the UC**

What: **Political Polarization, Affirmative Action, Church and State and more!**

Registration is
required!
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to sign up today!





Poster for the most recent Bridging the Divide event. (Courtesy of Hannah Woelfel)

Division I Rejects cover Falcons' first win of season

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UW-River Falls Falcons won the first game of the season after defeating Alma College 45-33. The game was covered live by Division I Rejects at Ramer Field on Saturday, Oct. 6.

Quarterback Kaleb Blaha completed 28 passes with five touchdowns, reaching a career-high.

Head coach Matt Walker told Division I Rejects, "We've got maybe the two best Quarterbacks in the Country going," referring to Kaleb Blaha and Alma College quarterback Carter St. John. Blaha was just 50 yards shy of UW-River Falls' single-game record set by Ben Beckerman in 2019.

Stephen Reifenberger also had a career-high day, hauling in five catches for 185 yards and three touchdowns. Gage Timm anchored the defense with 12 tackles, while Noah Nusbaum also recorded 12 tackles, including 2.5 for loss and a forced fumble. Jaylen Reed scored in his first game as a Falcon.

In the fourth quarter, Alma made a strong push with a 53-yard touchdown pass followed by a blocked punt returned for a score, trimming the UW-River Falls lead to 45-33. To seal the win, the Falcons' defense forced a pair of Scots turnovers on downs late in the fourth.

Division I Rejects joined Falcon alumnus Seth Howard to cover the game. Division I Rejects is a YouTube and online platform affiliated with UW-River Falls that covers the university's Division III football and other campus events, which it broadcast during the 2025 season.

"We give light to those Division II and III guys," said Kobe Manzo, who has been covering undervalued ath-



The football team walks to the locker room to prepare for the game against Alma College. (Photo by Johan Harworth)

letes across the country since 2020 and strives to provide teams and players with the professional coverage they deserve. UW-River Falls invited Division I Rejects for a facility tour. "I was blown away by the facility and the setup for a Division III — gotta be honest here — it's really incredible what we have down there for the student-athletes," Manzo said.

Small School Saturday kicked off with UW-River Falls, featuring a revamped production and fresh format, according to Kobe Manzo of Division I Rejects.

"The energy at smaller schools is absolutely felt — by the coaches, the parents, the whole community," Manzo said. "Would I be open to coming back? Absolutely."

English Department, Faculty Senate Chair Dr. Moline retires after 19 years

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In June 2025, Dr. Mialisa Moline, former Chair of the UW-River Falls Faculty Senate and former department chair of English, TESOL and Modern Languages, announced her retirement, effective at the start of the 2025–26 academic year.

Citing personal loss and campus-wide changes, Moline said it was time for someone younger to “take up the fight.” She leaves behind a legacy of standing up for her beliefs, supporting students and faculty, and paving the way for a better tomorrow.

Moline began her career at UW–River Falls in 2006, after serving as a faculty member at Arizona State Polytechnic University. From the beginning of her 19-year tenure, she championed one principle: academic freedom.

At UW–River Falls, faculty members typically take about six years to achieve tenure, which provides job security and protects against dismissal except for just cause or program closure. To Moline, tenure represents trust between senior and junior faculty — a signal that newer professors can pursue research without oversight from more experienced colleagues.

When it comes to research considered risky or controversial — such as the study of stem cells — tenured professors don’t have to fear being fired or redirected.

Moline’s advocacy for academic freedom stems from what she describes as the weaponization of “cancel culture.” She believes that its use across the political spectrum has left professors caught in the middle, pressured by outsiders to steer research away from topics that challenge norms.

“The tenure protections are more about the freedom to decide what I wanted to study and research as a professional,” said Moline.

She joined the UW–River Falls Faculty Senate in 2012, the legislative arm of the faculty, which gives professors a voice in university governance. Known for her blunt honesty and willingness to speak hard truths, Moline was elected Faculty Senate chair. She held the role until 2020, when she stepped down to become department chair of English, TESOL and Modern Languages, returning to the Senate chair position in 2024.

Moline said her outspokenness stemmed from experience and conviction.

Despite retiring, she continues to pursue research — currently studying how digital spaces affect communication skills.

Her commitment to academic freedom and courage in difficult conversations have made her a role model for



Dr. Mialisa Moline. (Courtesy of UW-River Falls)

a generation of students.
“Look to the future and don’t be quiet,” she said.

Faculty awards for excellence, research, development

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Six UW–River Falls faculty members received awards at the university’s opening meeting on Aug. 25. The awards, funded by alumni donations, are intended to support research, innovation and professional development.

Two faculty members received the Paul B. and Robert Dykstra Faculty Excellence Award, which recognizes tenured or tenure-track faculty involved in or proposing research. Shawyn Domyancich-Lee, associate professor of social work, and Brooke Krejci, professor of mathematics, were honored with the award.

“I think being able to be recognized for my research is incredibly meaningful,” said Domyancich-Lee. “But I think that my interest really is in sustainability and environmental justice and making those issues and topics a part of, you know, curricula across programs at any college or university. And so I hope to continue to be able to do that at UW- River Falls.”

Krejci said the support helps validate work that happens beyond the classroom.

“I just want to share ways that help improve students’ learning experiences of math, and hopefully we can get rid of the stigma around fractions being such a challenge or difficult.”

The Keith Wurtz Award for Teaching Excellence was

presented to three faculty members: Hannah Freeman, assistant professor of art; Bob Zhiwei Zeng, assistant professor of agricultural engineering technology; and Blair Troutd, assistant professor of chemistry and biotechnology. The award recognizes innovative approaches to education, outreach and collaboration.

“I feel this award is really not a reflection of my work, but also the journey I have been through with students and colleagues as well,” said Zeng “I guess I just feel honored to be recognized by this award.”

“It’s nice to see that my effort I’m putting in has been recognized,” said Troutd. “In that class I really try to focus on preparing them as students and not as much on preparing them as chemists... Even though I know that chemistry might not be their favorite subject, it’s nice to see that my effort I’m putting in has been recognized.”

The final award, the Manley Olsen Instructional Academic Staff Professional Award, was presented to English lecturer Rhonda Petree. The award supports professional development for academic staff.

Petree said she was honored to receive the award and looks forward to attending the National Council of Teachers of English conference in Denver, Colorado.

“I’m excited for myself,” she said “but what I’m really happy about is the possibility of my UWRF students also attending this conference.”

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Plant and Earth Science Department wins UW Award

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The UW–River Falls Plant and Earth Science Department received the Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents Excellence in Teaching Award for Academic Departments in August.

When asked about the award, Professor Holly Dolliver said the department is proud of the accomplishment and credited the systems in place that helped earn the recognition.

“This award is not only meaningful for those who are here today, but also recognizes the work, accomplishments and foundation laid by faculty who have since retired,” said Dolliver.

As part of the nomination process, departments must

submit a narrative and documentation one year in advance.

The Plant and Earth Science Department benefited from its long history of cultivating a strong program, supported by dedicated faculty since its inception.

The department is considered one of the most interdisciplinary in higher education.

It includes six individual majors, with overlapping course content that gives students a well-rounded education and multiple ways to apply their studies to real-world fields.

This interdisciplinary approach emphasizes “high-impact learning and teaching.”

The UW–River Falls campus offers a variety of outdoor environments that enhance this model, including the South Fork of the Kinnickinnic River, registered

campus forests, university farms and the newly established Wildflower Farm.

These spaces provide students with hands-on learning experiences across all majors.

In addition to its academic offerings, the department invests heavily in support staff.

Notable contributors include the campus greenhouse managers and the Ecological Restoration Institute, which collaborates on student-accessible projects.

The award reflects the department’s commitment to excellence and the collaborative support of faculty, staff and campus partners.

From DIB to SIB: A New Face

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The University of Wisconsin - River Falls rebranded its Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (DIB) office following an executive order to disband all diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives at schools and universities.

Along with the name change, the office dissolved its director position, leading to uncertainty about its role and importance within the UW–River Falls community.

In spring 2025, Dean of Students Dr. Michael Gilmer reassured students that the office would remain, though its goals and branding would be revised. The announcement sparked frustration among students and rumors of a potential protest in response to the UW System’s actions.

By fall 2025, the office had officially transitioned to the Student Inclusion and Belonging (SIB) office, now led by Student Success and Engagement Manager May Xiong. The office operates under the Student Success Center but maintains its own dedicated space for students and faculty.

Xiong, who joined UW–River Falls over the summer, previously worked in higher education at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. She said she hopes to continue her passion for student support in her new role.

“Change is always hard,” Xiong said. “I really want to put the students first. The hardest part for me is being able to relate to the students and getting them to trust me, so they can share some of their ideas and experiences with me— and so far, it’s been really, really good.”

The former DIB office was known as a hub for identity-based student organizations. Xiong said she is committed to maintaining that tradition.

“I want to keep the tradition of this being identity based, so that individuals who don’t feel like they fit into mainstream have a safe place where they can feel respected. That’s something that I want to continue and foster.”

Xiong said she hopes to increase awareness of SIB and connect more students with its resources and opportunities. She has expressed interest in hosting “pop-up” services around campus and tabling in the University Center to promote the office.

One of her main goals this year is to grow student use of the SIB space. “I’m hoping that by having inclusive experiences through programs like Aspire, outreach, leadership workshops and campus activities, people will become more

curious — like, ‘What’s SIB?’” she said.

While some students were initially unsettled by the changes, many have begun to embrace the new direction.

Elijah Moua and Osheana Lor, president and vice president of the Asian American Student Association, said they are optimistic about Xiong’s leadership.

“I think it’s been great,” Moua said. “She’s doing a great job starting new activities and events, pulling social groups together, checking in on us, working to bring back the Aspire program, and updating students on new opportunities and resources.”

Lor added, “[Xiong] is doing a great job of exposing SIB and other orgs to students, showing that this is who we are as cultural organizations.”

Emily Murray, vice president of the Student Feminist Organization, said her interactions with Xiong have been brief but positive. “I think May has been trying her best to reorganize the SIB office programming in a way that is both cost-efficient while still representing the multiple identities that students have,” she said.

“Change is always hard... I really want to put the students first, the hardest part for me is being able to relate to the students and getting them to trust me, so they can share some of their ideas and experiences with me and so far it’s been really, really good.”

— May Xiong

Not all students feel the transition has gone smoothly. Nanati Omer, a third-year student, said communication has been lacking.

“She has an idea of what she wants to do, but the way she’s executing it is not collaborative — it’s more directive,” Omer said. “She hasn’t communicated with other student orgs about what she’s doing, why she’s doing it and how she’s doing it. It’s kind of a ‘find out when you do’ situation.”

Omer also expressed disappointment in the office’s name

change, saying she felt safer on campus when diversity was explicitly part of the title. “It upsets me that the original name was taken away,” she said.

While some students chose not to comment directly, others have voiced similar concerns about the office’s direction.

Despite mixed reactions, identity-based student organizations continue to move forward and engage with the campus community.

Xiong said she is working hard to innovate and create engaging programs for students. She plans to continue traditions such as the movie night series — with an educational twist — as well as events like Friendsgiving and “put up a tent” gatherings.

“I want the space to come back better than ever,” she said. “With only a month of school down, it’s just the beginning. The campus and the people in it have been nothing short of welcoming.”

SIB UPCOMING EVENTS

OCT. AND NOV. '25

15
WED

UNITY VOICES
5-7 PM IN THE UC BALLROOM

30
THU

HALLOWEEN PARTY
5PM IN THE SIB LOUNGE IN RODLI

03
MON

LUNCH AND LEARN
12-1 PM IN THE FIRESIDE LOUNGE

12
FRI

TENT CONTEST
1-3 PM IN THE LAWN BY BASKETBALL

19
WED

MOVIE & FRIENDSGIVING
4:30-7 PM IN THE SIB LOUNGE (RODLI)

GRAPHIC BY: ALISON KEELER

Editorial: Okta change leaves students confused

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Cybersecurity is important—anyone can tell you that much.

With the rise in AI technologies, many companies, schools, and workplaces have increased security around login systems to prevent passwords from being stolen and personal data being breached.

For the past 10 years, the University of Wisconsin-River Falls has protected student accounts on UWRF websites using Duo, a mobile app that sends push notifications for login verification.

Originally, Duo required users to tap a check mark to confirm their login, later adding a prompt to enter a three-digit code displayed on the device being accessed.

Recently though, at the beginning of the month, students were notified through email about a new change.

Earlier this month, students were notified via email that UW–River Falls will switch from Duo to Okta for login identification, effective Oct. 31. While there are several reasons for the change, many students are questioning whether the rollout was handled properly—and whether it will benefit the campus in the long run.

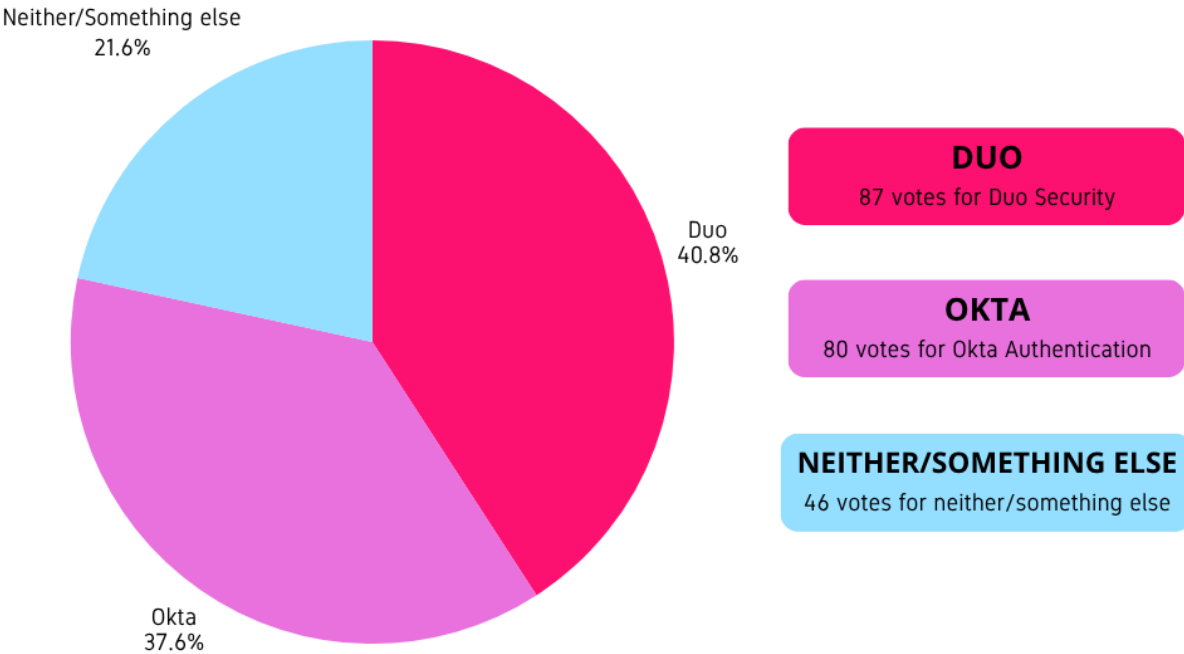
In an interview with Peter Reese, chief information officer for the Division of Technology Services (DOTS), several factors behind the switch were clarified. Duo costs UW–River Falls approximately \$50,000 annually, while Okta is significantly cheaper (though no specific estimate was provided).

The larger reason, however, stems from the Universities of Wisconsin system. As part of the Administrative Transformation Program (ATP), all UW campuses standardized their financial, human resources and research administration processes using the application Workday. During this transition, campuses — including UW–River Falls — opted to standardize login identification through Okta to align with systemwide platforms.

While Okta helps UW–River Falls stay current with the broader system, many students are struggling with the transition. According to our research, approximately 41% of students said they preferred Duo, compared to 37% who welcomed the switch to Okta. The remaining 22% expressed indifference. Notably, most students who favored Okta were first-year students.

The main concern, however, wasn't the change itself — it was the lack of communication leading up to it. Students were first notified via email on Oct. 1, leaving many confused and unprepared. Reese said the timing was intentional, designed to avoid overwhelming students returning to campus with a sudden change during the start of the semester.

Still, students reported widespread misinformation about



Duo vs. Okta Pie Chart

An anonymous poll on Yik Yak surveyed 213 people

GRAPHIC BY: ALISON KEELER

Okta, especially regarding the date Duo would be discontinued. Many also said the emails from DOTS lacked clear setup instructions. Some students reported issues where they had already set up Okta but were still prompted to use Duo to log in.

When asked to comment on the transition, Interim Chancellor John Chenoweth said, “Switching to the Okta platform continues our commitment to keeping user data safe while making it easier to access the tools our campus community relies on every day. We will be aligned with the broader Universities of Wisconsin, making it easier to support centralized platforms and giving a more secure and user-friendly experience. Keeping data secure is an ongoing, essential effort, and I’m glad that the change will also make access to university services easier for our students, faculty and staff.”

Overall, the transition to Okta feels more convoluted than necessary. Many questions remain unanswered, and the initial communications left much to be desired.

To help students still confused by the transition, here are step-by-step instructions from the UW–River Falls Knowledge Base:

- How to install Okta:
1. Install the Okta Verify App on your mobile device.
 2. Open the app and tap “+” in the upper right corner to add an account.
 3. Select the “Organization (work, school, company)” as the account type.
 4. Tap “Skip” if you don’t have another device set up.
 5. Select “No, Sign In Instead.”
 6. Enter “myapps.uwrf.edu” as the Organization Sign-in URL and tap “Next.”
 7. Log in with your Falcon account credentials when prompted.
 8. Enable confirmation when prompted.
 9. Tap “Done” when you see the success message.
- For deleting Duo:
1. Go to myapps.uwrf.edu
 2. Click on your name in the top right corner and select Settings
 3. Under Security Methods for the option you wish to remove, click the remove button.



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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.

UW-River Falls volleyball team serves up new season

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The University of Wisconsin-River Falls volleyball team held their first game this year on Aug. 29. This led the team on a series of tournaments and away games to begin their season. As a result, the Falcons’ first regular-season home game took place at 7 p.m. on Sept. 23 against St. Catherine University.

The match went to five sets, with UW–River Falls winning 3–2. Sets one, two and five were claimed by the Falcons, while St. Catherine took sets three and four.

Although St. Catherine’s is not part of the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC), they are still a part of the National College Athletic Association (NCAA) for women’s volleyball. Commonly referred to as St. Kate’s or the Wildcats, they held a season record of 5–11 at the time of the match.

UW–River Falls posted 88 digs, 61 assists and 65 kills against the Wildcats. Blessing Adebisi led the Falcons with 17 kills and four blocks. Olivia Noble recorded 49 assists, and Audrey Petersen added 31 digs.

The Falcons currently hold a 9–9 record for the fall season, compared to last year’s overall record of 12–20.

As the season continues, UW–River Falls aims to build momentum.

Following a stretch of away games in Whitewater, Wisconsin, the team will compete in the UWRF Quadrangular to begin its October schedule.



The Falcons huddle up during a timeout in the first set of the game against St. Catherine’s University. The score that night concluded in a 3-2 win for the UW-River Falls Falcons. (Photo by Alison Keeler)



Blessing Adebisi (21) spikes the ball over the net during the first set against St. Catherine.



Kelsey Klesner (6) jumps for a spike during the game on Sept. 23 versus St. Kates. (Photos by Alison Keeler)

UW–River Falls players Reese Bauman (22), Ada Schlenker (16) and Olivia Noble (9) wait for the referee to resume play Tuesday night against St. Catherine. (Photo by Alison Keeler)

Visit the Student Voice website at uwrfvoice.com