

Provost Remarks: Academic Affairs Mid-Year Update – Feb. 13, 2026

Provost Powers Remarks:

Greetings everyone and welcome to the Academic Affairs Mid-Year Update. As you know, at the start of a semester I provide a Fall Address, that one in conjunction with the Deans, and in the Spring I do it with the Associate Provosts, although this time have a few other guests. The addresses are designed to be one part perspective on where we've come, one part on where we are now, and one part where we are headed as a Division. Furthermore, they are intended to complement the President's Address the week prior, although with topics more central to the Academic Affairs Division.

This year the theme is "economic and social mobility". In a moment, I will dive into it in more depth, but these images here are a practical manifestation of that orientation for the University, and with a similar image in the middle to one in the President's Address last week. It is a photograph of the formal signing of first ever 3+1 Agreements a few months ago with our friends at Passaic County Community College in the disciplines of psychology and of various degrees in business. Flanking that picture was a joint sign-up event held at PCCC. Not only are these two major fields ones with substantive job opportunities post-college or as a pathway to graduate school, but they represent a direct and affordable feeder from an associates to a bachelors, but one in which they can complete the third year at PCCC. As of December, 12 students had already signed up, students who otherwise likely would not be, either for financial reasons or a choice to pursue their bachelor's at a different institution.

Before we dive into the theme, I do want to speak briefly about transition in Academic Affairs. As you know, two dear colleagues, Sandy Hill and Claudia Tormino, decided that they were ready for a next phase in life and retired. Rhonda Gordon was also ready to down shift and is now working for a private high school a block from her house. All of course are missed. However, I am so pleased to relay that two fabulous campus professionals have joined the Provost's Office, Tim Lever and Cicile Samiz, she in support of his area effective February 17. Both are seasoned experts on finance and personnel matters and we are thrilled to have them on our team. Tim also oversees the Office of Sponsored Programs which as you know is going great guns despite all the rhetoric emanating from Washington, DC.

I would also be remiss to not mention that now for a second time, Stockton University has plucked associate dean talent from WP, a few years ago in Ian Marshall and very recently David Fuentes who will start there in April. The President and I like to tease our counterparts at Stockton that what is really happening is they are becoming WP south. Not really, but it is exciting that they once again will get to enjoy the talents of our academic professionals in Dean capacities. David, I know you are out there somewhere and we are so pleased for you and wish you the best as you wrap things up here and take on new duties in a few months at Stockton.

OK, now back to the theme for today's address. Let me start by saying that as you hear something from me, or my colleagues that follow, that resonates, or prompts a question, post it in the Q&A Panel. We won't have time to be responsive at this session, but want to hear your thoughts, and will answer questions in the days following. So with that, let me start. As is obvious, the theme of economic and social mobility shows up at the bottom of each slide. But what you may not recall, is where it actually comes from. [SLIDE 4b] Well, most specifically, it comes from our new Mission Statement, now just over two years old. Embedded in these 72 words, arguably the most difficult of the Committee's tasks to keep it to 75 words maximum as

was our charge, is the anchoring sentence following who we are descriptively. In brief, both inside and outside of the classroom, we are INTENTIONAL about ensuring students not only receive an education that enables their competitiveness for a good job or the pursuit of graduate study to ultimately get there, but we want to be sure it is about BOTH economic and social opportunity.

Whereas you may have recalled that the theme phraseology came from the new Mission Statement, you may not recall that we also had a parallel document, actually in place the year before the Mission Statement was formally adopted by the Trustees, namely a WP Branding and Identity Plan. This particular statement fleshes out how we seek to enable students access to a career but also to an attractive quality of life that college affords when well designed. Our systemic support efforts on academics, career development, and campus life is intentionally distinctive.

As a precursor to what you will hear from others in a few minutes, I wanted to take just a moment to contextualize the economic and social benefits of college. First, I will briefly say, that from literally the birth of higher education in this country until the 1980s and early 1990s, the discussion about college's value was its societal one – we all benefit economically and socially by having an educated citizenry. Thomas Jefferson and John Dewey among others spoke to it, our Land Grant Acts, the GI Bill, the Great Society Movement, and Sputnik among other policy actions were investments in it. In the 1980s under Reagan, though, critique began on ROI and the efficiency of colleges. In the 1990s, oddly under democratic leadership with Bill Clinton, higher education began to realize disinvestment as feelings grew that it made better sense to lock people up through expansion of prisons rather than to educate them. Since higher education was more of a private good in a growing number of policymaker minds at the time, they felt it was tacitly OK to shift the cost burden more and more onto the student through tuition.

Regardless one's feelings on such policy and its now decades long impact, it does make sense to emphasize economic and social mobility benefits and here is a helpful schema for operationalizing them. Each of these has an extensive body of research behind it, although some are hard to explain in a soundbite or feel as personal as say an average income immediately post college. But, such benefits are nevertheless critical. On the left are the individual benefits, both economic and social. On the right are society's benefits, what frankly carried the day until the 1990s. Although arguably we need to do a better job arguing for the right side, today, though, it is the left side that is the core to our survival and what resonates for legislators and students and their families alike given the cost investment required to obtain a degree.

I do wish to point out, though, that students have always placed personal benefits high on their list of reasons for attending college as this chart shows, and only grew in emphasis over the decades. The American College Freshmen Survey is the largest and longest running attitudinal survey of students in U.S. history, with its start in 1966 – when I was 3 I might add. The set of questions has changed some over the years as you can see on the dates. I highlighted what I call the “instrumental” ones focused on jobs and opportunity that comes from graduate education, as well as the growth in worry about paying for college. Yet I also want to point out that some of the other things we as educators value, for instance a general education and appreciation of ideas, also grew in importance over 50+ years among students.

OK, I now want to pass the baton to colleagues to speak about how in the past two years we are acting on the Mission priority of economic and social mobility. Each presenter has specific contributions they want to emphasize, and in some cases, will have short recordings of

others who have been innovative in this space, or of students who have been the beneficiaries of it. And as a reminder as you hear something that resonates, or prompts a question, put it in the chat. We won't be responsive in this session but want your thoughts and will answer questions received in the days post-presentation. Jonathan, I turn things to you.

Closing Remarks: Thank you colleagues for each of your insights on how economic and social mobility, as well as social justice, is being advanced in courses, curricula and other Academic Affairs initiatives. And thank you to the partners out there in other Divisions who are such great collaborators in this effort. I hope each of you took away some ideas for what you might do in new ways with your courses and curriculum and don't hesitate to reach out to colleagues to gain insights or to collaborate. Our students are depending on us to deliver.

Dr. Jonathan Lincoln Remarks:

Thank you, Josh.

When I reflect on curriculum initiatives that support economic and social mobility for students, the first that comes to mind is our recent UCC update. We have asked Murli Natrajan, UCC Director, to discuss that initiative.

[Murli speaks for slides 9, 10 , 11 and ends by introducing the Chris Salerno Video (slide 12)]

Dr. Balmurli Natrajan, UCC Director Remarks:

Good afternoon. <SLIDE 1> The UCC 2.0 is a student-centric core curriculum built around a set of skills, capacities, knowledges, and perspectives consistently demanded over the last decade or more by employers around the world. This includes the core skills of writing, communication, creativity, critical thinking and problem solving, digital literacies, quantitative literacies, data and analytical skills along with a set of orientations and perspectives and knowledge of being civically aware and engaged, globally connected, and historically shaped by systemic forms of inequalities. It is thus a bold curriculum designed to bring together **Economic and Social Mobility with Social Justice** in intentional ways. Not as a simple add & stir, or as a set of hoops to jump through. But as a dialectic that reveals how the two are inextricably linked, in tension with each other, and how viewing them together is an invitation to produce deeper and higher levels of understanding of life, living, the world, and our place in it as shapers of history.

We would have failed our students and our profession if our curriculum and pedagogy had only focused on one side of the dialectic (the economic and social mobility) and stopped there without enabling our students to simultaneously reflect on the conditions for their own existence in this world, on how the enduring myth of individualism masks how success depends on many others, that no person is an island unto themselves, that one cannot thrive while others around us are barely surviving. Conditions of existence that are also shaped intimately by a cultural world of increasingly open and vitriolic resurgence of supremacisms and xenophobias; overt racism and routine legitimations of racism and colonialism; weaponization of anti-gender ideologies; denigration and dismissal of people with disabilities; assaults on bodies that defy patriarchal and heterosexist norms; newer and meaner ways of exploiting and humiliating workers; ecological ravage; unapologetic attacks on the foundations of democracies.

<SLIDE 2> Teaching students in such a world brings a unique set of responsibilities to educational institutions – to show that we are not condemned to naturalize inequalities and

domination around us in our quest for mobility. And instead to show how we embrace a value born from the depths of oppression but with hope for all and best expressed by Mary Church Terrell – to “Lift as we Climb” more than a century and a half ago. A value that comes from a pioneer educator and one of the earliest African American women to get a college degree.

Economic & Social Mobility with Social Justice is exactly what will make our students not only get jobs but bring a distinctive value to their degrees – as critical thinking and civically engaged citizens. UCC 2.0 operates on the vision that successful professionals will be those that lead not merely manage, those who are civically engaged because they are aware of our political and historical responsibilities, those who are passionate while being compassionate, those whose humanity does not disappear within the calculation of self-interests. With a strong UCC 2.0 at the core of their curriculum (43 out of 120 credits), our graduates can

- not only get well-paying jobs, chart career pathways, become leaders, and occupy positions of power but ask questions about the system of power, wealth and status;
- not only create employment for others but build organizations that are reflexive about how hiring gets done, where the glass ceilings and sticky floors are and why;
- not only produce and enjoy wealth but do it responsibly by asking where it comes from and why it is not better distributed.
- not only be creative artists, musicians, poets and writers but also make works that tell stories of how humans can regain humanity, and as Brecht put it, boldly sing about the dark times;
- Not only contribute to advancements in science and technology, but also direct knowledge towards building a world of health and care for all.
- not only use resources but look for how any product is sourced, the conditions of labor around the world, and the costs to the planet and species.
- not only be part of governance structures that build, create, and plan, but make the well-being of the most vulnerable be central to these buildings, creations, and plans;
- not only become organizers, mobilizers and architectures of change but do it in ways that rethink and reorient leadership toward community and solidarity.

<SLIDE 3> The UCC 2.0 successfully embodies our new Mission. Its 90+ courses thus far combine a strong set of comprehensive foundational courses using disciplinary knowledge and perspectives, with a growing number of distinctive or unusual courses such as Creativity and Innovation, Everyday Beauty and Fashion, Writing with AI, Storytelling with Data, Turning Points in History, and Decolonizing Knowledge. This is, of course, an idiosyncratic and non-comprehensive list. There are several others. And I wish to thank all the faculty who have helped implement the UCC 2.0 thus far – the 72 faculty on Review panels, the Council members, the CCC members, and faculty who are teaching in the core curriculum. The vision of the UCC can only become a reality when driven by faculty who are passionate about teaching in a general education curriculum and who make their individual course come alive by pointing to how the course is part of the warp and weft of the UCC 2.0 - Economic and Social Mobility with Social Justice. And now we will hear from a faculty member, Chris Salerno, discussing the role of AI in the UCC and career preparation.

Dr. Jonathan Lincoln Remarks continued:

Thank you Murli and Chris for your reflections on the UCC.

Development of our Certificate Program is another initiative supporting economic and student mobility. As you may recall, an undergraduate certificate is a credential earned by completing 3 to 5 courses focused on specific skills or specialized content that help prepare students for the workplace. When a student completes one of the 50 UG certificates we now offer, they get a notation on their transcript, and they also receive a digital badge they can post on social media platforms or insert in a resume. We have awarded over 750 badges so far and this does not count the most recent conferrals currently in progress.

When a potential employer clicks on the badge, they can access a summary of what that student did to earn the certificate, including a set of Career Competencies addressed by the certificate. The eight Career Competencies we attach to our badges are defined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) and signal for potential employers what career-ready skills our students have achieved.

This chart shows that we are now offering multiple certificates addressing all eight NACE Career Competencies with particular emphasis on technology, critical thinking and communication skills – all critical skills that will help our students pursue successful careers. Thank you to all who have been involved in developing, promoting and delivering these certificates for our students.

Next Slide please

A third initiative colleges, departments and individual faculty have been engaged in is ensuring that our students have some form of career preparation embedded in the curriculum. This can range from a class assignment to attend a resume writing workshop to requiring experiential learning in a course or program.

As of last year, nearly 60% of all students graduated with some form of experiential learning required in their academic program and that has been increasing year by year. This is most commonly in the form of student teaching, clinical experience, practicum courses, internships and undergraduate research. These categories of experiential learning may not fit all academic programs – so how do we reach 100%? Colleges and departments are finding ways that make sense for their programs and students:

For example, the Cotsakos College of Business is now a couple years into a college-wide Professional Enrichment program that all majors in the college are required to enroll in each semester – this program is built into their degree requirements. Thanks to the good work of Despina Martinez who directs the program for the college with support from the Career Development Center, students participate in an array of activities such as networking events, career development workshops, job simulations, career fairs, internships and so on every semester for their four years at WP. Within the next couple of years, every student in the college will be graduating with career preparation and experiential learning embedded in their academic program. Let's hear a College of Business student speak about the program:

[Run video on Slide 15]

Assistance is available to help faculty and departments add career preparation components to their courses and academic programs. Mary-Alice Barrows and her team at the Career Development Center have compiled a rich set of resources and tools that you can make use of including workshops, job simulations, mini-internships, job shadowing opportunities, non-credit internships, etc. Starting this year, they have worked with academic affairs to create two non-credit experiential learning notations that can be added to the transcript so there is a formal record of a student's career preparation activities.

Let's hear from a faculty member, Lucia McMahon, about her experiences collaborating with the Career Development Center:

[Run video on Slide 17]

Thank you, Lucia. And thank you to the great staff in the Career Development Center for the support you have provided for these initiatives. And now I pass the baton to Kara Rabbit to discuss what's happening over in the College of Adult and Professional Studies.

Dr. Kara Rabbitt Remarks:

[SLIDE 18]--K Rabbitt

I would like to begin this part of our presentation by framing the *why* of the work that we will speak to. As we reflect on how William Paterson University is advancing the economic and social mobility of our students, we need to recall that for decades, higher education has been leaving behind roughly half of the students we recruit and enroll, with a disproportionate impact on lower-income Pell eligible students. When we discuss 4- and 6-year graduation rates, we gloss over the other side of that number—those who have stopped out, the 40-55% of college-enrolling students nationally who do not go on to graduate. These students often leave our institutions with debt but without the educational and proven economic benefits of a post-secondary degree.

As a result of our most recent strategic plan, William Paterson established the College of Adult & Professional Studies, or CAPS, in 2024 to serve this population. Working with partners across campus, the CAPS team assists adults might who move through professional certificate and training programs from unemployment into jobs, as well as the stopped-out former students who return seeking to build on their professional experiences to complete their undergraduate degrees and, in many cases, move into graduate study. I'd like to highlight just a few of their stories as we begin.

Israel and Barbee are two main campus adult learners whose success in their undergraduate degrees was supported by the resources our campus has built over the past few years to serve this key population. Israel is a veteran, an entrepreneur, and a current graduate student who serves as president of the WP chapter of the national adult learner honor society, Alpha Sigma Lambda. Barbee works in the non-profit sector and after earning her degree in Community & Social Justice Studies is now pursuing her Masters in Public Policy here at WP.

Diana and Geo were stopped-out adult learners who were able to return to complete their degrees via our online programs. Their gratitude for the support that WP provided them to achieve their goals has inspired them to give back as members of the new College of Adult & Professional Studies Advisory Council. Geo is working to establish a scholarship to serve returning adult learners, and Diana supports current adult students in understanding the rigor and benefits of credit for prior learning.

As highlighted by President Helldobler last week, the recent growth in adult learner enrollments at WP is to our institutional benefit, in that our collective focus on this pillar of our recent Strategic Plan has yielded new degree completion and graduate level enrollments that are offsetting the students this region is losing due to the economic and demographic shifts that put fewer students in NJ on the path from high school to college. This will be an important point to keep in focus as we move forward across the five planned frames of our new Strategic Plan to ensure that we continue to engage and support our changing student population.

Just as importantly, however, the work we're doing in this area is also serving, to Provost Power's point, the individual economic advancement of the students our new systems of support are bringing back and the social advancement of their communities and families. Our collective work with this population is serving to help students like Israel gain new employment opportunities. It is helping students like Barbee better serve their communities. It is helping working parents, like Diana and Geo, to support their families and to put their own children on the path to higher education. As Geo shared, his degree helped him advance professionally immediately and allowed him to buy a home for his family. Every adult learner who comes back to WP to finish their degree or to advance the next level of their education has a story. Sometimes this story involves prior educational trauma, often the story involves professional achievements and personal grit manifested during the period away from formal study. Like those whose stories we highlight today, our adult learners are inspiring, and they are highly motivated. The very act of returning to us indicates a newfound recognition of the value of what we provide in our programs.

I would like to spend some of our time today speaking to one important tool we have advanced in William Paterson's support for Credit for Prior Learning, or CPL. CPL is just a tool that helps ensure that the story these students finish with us this time is one of success.

When President Helldobler mentioned last week that William Paterson University has experienced a 100-fold growth in Credit for Prior Learning, these are the data he was referencing:

- In 2021, when we established Degree Completion and Adult Learning in what is now the College of Adult & Professional Studies, we awarded 54 credits of CPL
- In the 2025 calendar year, we awarded 5,401 credits of CPL
- The graph here shows both the growth in credits students earn this way, and the increasing numbers of students—both adult and traditional learners—who are making use of this tool to support their degree completion

- For adult learners, CPL provides an important step on the pathway from their professional experiences through to graduation; here are just a few examples from 2025:
 - 27 students in the Accelerated Professional CCJ program earned 30 credits for their prior professional training in policework or corrections, supporting enrollment growth in that major and providing important critical skills and social justice awareness to working law enforcement personnel
 - 16 students with current NJ realtor licenses earned 3 credits in FIN 4270 Real Estate Finance. These students might have been in any of our majors, but they had already completed college-level financial training in this area to attain their licensure
 - 13 students who were licensed EMTs or Pharmacy Care Technicians earned 4 credits for BIO 1140 Applied Anatomy and Physiology. Many of these allied health professionals are returning to earn a degree with us on a path to graduate level professional goals in health-related fields.

These credits honored what our students learned and achieved outside of their time at the University. Just as importantly, CPL assisted these returning adults to save money, to stay motivated, and to persist toward degree completion.

So, what is credit for prior learning? I invite Johanna Prado, Director of Degree Completion & Adult Learning in the College of Adult & Professional Studies, to share some details.

Mrs. Johanna Prado Remarks:

Good Afternoon everyone,

I will quickly review the process and forms of **Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)**.

By definition, the term credit for prior learning applies to the following five forms:

Portfolio assessment allows students to demonstrate college-level subject area knowledge gained through work experience as assessed by a faculty expert.

Credit by Examination is a faster means for students to demonstrate knowledge. Institutional course challenge exams are the gold standard for this assessment, and we are working with departments to build this area. For now, where institutional challenge exams are not available, WP accepts external testing companies like CLEP, DSST, Sophia Learning, or others where students can demonstrate college-level knowledge by passing an exam. This form of CPL is also reviewed by faculty to ensure equivalency.

Credit by credential are designated course credit equivalencies for professional certificates and licenses (as recommended by the American Council on Education through national faculty-led panel review) or for professional knowledge gained through workplace training and as approved by our faculty here. The NJ Real Estate license equivalency that Kara mentioned is an example of this form of CPL.

The last two forms of CPL—institutional transfer credits and military transcripts—are evaluated outside of DCAL in the Office of Admissions.

Beyond the administrative benefits, these pathways serve as a vital engine for student success and equity. A national study conducted in 2020 by CAEL and WICHE shows that Credit for Prior Learning significantly improves credential completion for adult learners across all subgroups, including historically underrepresented students.

With the assistance of IT, the Registrar, and the deans, we have created an internal workflow to automate and streamline the CPL review process shown here in order to reduce administrative barriers and provide qualified students with an accelerated path to degree completion.

This review process relies heavily on **department chairs and faculty**, who serve as our vital subject matter experts. CPL evaluates university-level knowledge by validating specific learning outcomes gained by the student outside the classroom; learners must demonstrate they have achieved **at least 80% of the required learning outcomes** of a course to receive credit.

In addition to supporting our students with CPL, in the College of Adult & Professional Studies we also help build adult learner community and belonging for both main campus and WP Online learners. We are truly with them from beginning to end. We hold Adult Learner recruitment events with Admissions to help bring back stopped out and degree-seeking students. We host biannual regional job fairs with the NJ Department of Labor to support learners seeking career advancement at all levels of employment. We provide a dedicated virtual orientation to welcome our online students, to which we invite current student speakers so that the incoming adult learners can see a reflection of their own potential and visualize their own path to graduation. This helps them feel part of a community that understands their unique challenges and needs. With campus partners, we also host events for both main campus and online students focused on adult learner needs, such as the virtual events listed here. We offer FREE Peer Career Learning courses where students learn more about credit for prior learning, build community with adult peers, and have the opportunity to earn CPL credits. High-achieving undergraduate adult learners are also invited to join the Alpha Sigma Lambda National Honor Society to celebrate their academic excellence. But beyond the accolades and the infrastructure, the real impact of this work is seen in the stories of resilience and success from our students. In this photo we see two of our adult learners with their daughter at our Honor Society Induction ceremony – Diana recently completed her MBA at WP and Giovanni is currently pursuing his Master’s Degree. Together they embody how higher education advances both economic and social mobility for families across generations. We are very aware that we are not only serving our students but their families as well.

[SLIDE 26]--And now we would like to share just one student’s story in her own words.

Dr. Kara Rabbitt remarks continues:

Thank you, Johanna. As attested by Annie’s story, CPL is critical for recruiting and retaining adult learners. We are seeing year over year increases of roughly 20% of CPL use by both our

main campus and WP Online adult learners, and our supports for this degree accelerant have been key in recruiting new UG students to our campus. They are also important means for retaining this population.

I want to add that the CPL supports we have built to recruit and retain adult learners also serve traditional students. Those who advise students know how often our undergraduates find themselves nearing graduation with all requirements met but a few credits short of the 120 for the degree.

In that 10-fold growth of CPL credits shared earlier, the single largest equivalent used (60% of CPL awarded in 2025 serving 1,025 students) is the CPR certificate: an undergraduate missing 1-3 credits for the degree who has earned this state-recognized certificate can graduate a full term earlier via this approved equivalency. While many collective efforts from offices across campus have contributed to our recent increases in graduation rates, I will note that the two-year transfer graduation rate jumped from 35% to 48% within two years of building CPL support and the 4-year graduation rate for FTFT students also grew 5 percentage points in this period. As we all work to improve student outcomes, CPL is an important tool in our student support kit.

Since CPL builds on prior college-level learning gained through training and experience, we can see its impact most directly in the transfer student success rates (graduation or continuing enrollment), as many transfer students are returning adult learners. When we look at what percentage of the incoming transfer cohort in 2024 graduated or were still enrolled a year later in 2025, we note a 13.5% increase for those students who made use of CPL in the 2024-2025 year compared to those who did not.

In our strategic efforts to support degree completion and professional advancement for ALL our students, I invite you to continue to engage with the CAPS team on leveraging the tools we use to support adult learners to assist every WP student in crossing that finish line to commencement in our collective goal to have more of our students land on the right side of the graduation metrics by which students, parents, and politicians judge our institutional effectiveness.