

# CAMPUS & COMMUNITY

## TRIO Open House Highlights Support for First-Gen, Underserved Students at UWS

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The TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program at the University of Wisconsin-Superior held an Open House on September 25, offering students a chance to learn more about the personalized support and resources available to help them succeed in college. While attendance from students was modest, staff and faculty showed strong support, underscoring the university's commitment to underserved populations.

Reggie Semanko, Interim Program Coordinator for TRIO SSS, spoke about the importance of the event and the program's mission, "TRIO is here to help students feel like they have someone in their corner," said Semanko. "We offer one-on-one help, create a sense of community, and truly understand where our students are coming from." What is TRIO?

TRIO SSS is a federally funded program designed to support students who are first-generation college students, income-eligible, or have a documented disability. The program offers a range of services to help students navigate higher education, including:

- One-on-one academic and personal support.
- Priority registration for competitive courses.
- Financial literacy workshops.
- Time management coaching.
- Assistance with graduate school applications.
- Grant aid scholarships for qualifying active members.

The program currently serves 160 students at UW-Superior.

"I Am an Example," Semanko, a UW-Superior alumnus and former participant in both the SSS and McNair programs, said his own experience is proof that TRIO works. "I graduated with high honors, summa cum laude. I am an example of what's possible with TRIO," she shared. "It's a full-circle moment for me to now be helping other students as interim coordinator."

TRIO also hosts a student-focused event, Study Power Hour—a weekly academic support session held Mondays from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. in the Swenson Hall TRIO Suite (Room 2047). Students interested in joining TRIO SSS at UW-Superior or want more information can visit [uwsuper.edu/trio](http://uwsuper.edu/trio) or contact [trioss@uwsuper.edu](mailto:trioss@uwsuper.edu).



TRIO Open House on Sept. 25, 2025, in the YU  
 Photo By Noa Mikami | The Promethean

## Student Support, Engagement

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On Aug. 5, in response to federal directives, the department at University of Wisconsin-Superior formally known as Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, restructured and adopted a new title: Student Support and Engagement (SSE). The rebranding does not diminish the purpose of these resources. For Director Salisa Hochstetler, the change reflects the department's evolving mission. "It more truly reflects the things that we do with all our students," Hochstetler said, "What we try to do here is create a sense of belonging."

Hochstetler's journey began as an international student at UWS. In 2018, she became the international student coordinator, then assistant director, and now leads the department. Her lived experience as an international student and her passion for supporting students help drive the department's success. "It's a good fit for the things that we had envisioned for the department," she said.

The SSE includes centers for veteran and nontraditional students, Indigenous cultures, gender equity and intercultural student success. As part of the restructuring, the Office of Intercultural Student Success split into three branches: Study Away Programs, International Student Services and Multicultural Affairs. "When you say 'intercultural,' a lot of students don't resonate with that name," Hochstetler explained, "So, we just call the specific services that we offer so students know exactly what it is."

The department offers support services tailored to a variety of individual needs, including academic help, social support and basic needs. "Some of the students are struggling with...language ability...homelessness, food...understanding health insurance...how to go to the clinic," Hochstetler said, "Also...help international students a lot with visas, immigration and whatnot," she added.

Nontraditional students often need help with technology and navigating campus systems. "Some are struggling with transitioning, coming back to school...how to find information," Hochstetler said.

The SSE's commitment to inclusive engagement opportunities remains strong. By celebrating and honoring events such as Veterans Day, Indigenous Peoples Day, Hispanic Heritage Month and National Coming Out Day, it helps students connect.

Hochstetler encourages all students to participate in events so that they learn about different cultures and ideas and make connections with one another. "I think that overall, we just need support...students to get support from one another...and us being out there for them to have another person to connect with," she said.

Maelle Rihouey, a junior from France and student worker in Multicultural Affairs, has been involved since her freshman year. She credits the department with helping her navigate challenges and feel at home. "They've helped me with so many things...from the moment I came here to now," she said, her first event was the Ethiopian New Year. "It just felt like home...everybody was talking with each other."

Rihouey encourages students to attend events, even if they come alone. "Just come and there are going to be people to welcome you," she said, "It's a great way to get involved and to learn."

The SSE welcomes everyone into its spaces regardless of their background, belief or identity. Students can visit SSE offices or email [belonging@uwsuper.edu](mailto:belonging@uwsuper.edu). "If someone feels like they have some ideas on what they want us to be doing to help foster that sense of belonging, we would be open to discuss those things," Hochstetler said.

## Getting involved while learning online

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For online college students, staying connected to campus life can be one of the most unexpected challenges. Remote programs offer flexibility, even so, they can also leave students feeling disconnected from the university community.

"It's wonderful that universities allow the option for students to enroll in online courses, as it allows great flexibility," said Libby Czerwonka, an online student at the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater. "However, it can also feel isolating at times."

Without in-person classes and daily interactions on campus, it can be hard to make connections with classmates or professors. "I got socialization through Zoom and Webex, but not outside of that," Czerwonka said, "It was a challenge at first, but then I really connected with some students. We got each other's school email addresses and phone numbers and created a group chat to discuss assignments and life events. That helped me feel more connected."

Many online students live far from campus, which makes attending events difficult. "I live an hour from campus. I've only gone to campus to pick up textbooks," Czerwonka said, "If someone asked me how to get to a certain building or sports arena, I wouldn't be able to tell them."

One way UW-Superior helps students, including those studying remotely, get involved is through Jackets Connect, the university's virtual platform for student organizations and campus events.

"Jackets Connect is the virtual platform for all student organizations," the university website states. "Through it, you can find organizations to join, events to attend, and track your campus involvement." For personal devices it is accessible through the Campus Groups app, the platform allows

students to browse clubs, view upcoming events and manage their co-curricular engagement.

Students interested in starting a new club can do so through 'Jackets Connect with just three other students and a vision. The Student Involvement Office helps guide students through the New Student Organization Recognition Process, starting with reaching out to [involvement@uwsuper.edu](mailto:involvement@uwsuper.edu).

While online learning can create physical distance, tools like Jackets Connect are helping to close the gap and ensure virtual students don't miss out on the college experience.

"Don't be afraid to reach out to students and instructors via email," Czerwonka said, "I used to avoid emailing peers or professors because I didn't want to ask 'dumb' questions or take up their time. But email is a great way to feel more connected."

As UW-Superior continues to expand its support for remote learners, students are finding new ways to build community, even from a distance. And sometimes, it just takes a small step, a message, a meeting, or a download, to turn online learning into a more connected experience.



T Wainman talking with a student in the VNCS on Sept. 26, 2025 in Old Main.  
 Photo By Ella Hill | The Promethean