

CAMPUS & COMMUNITY

Building Connection in a Digital World

Aidan Salama
asalama@uwsuper.edu

As higher education evolves to match our digital world, the University of Wisconsin–Superior stands out for its pattern of commitment to building a sense of community for online learners. Professors and administrators are working to en-



UWS provides resources for students to learn online, taken Oct. 29.
Photo by Aidan Salama | Promethean

sure that distance learning does not lack connection or support.

Beth Austin, a full-time professor in the Department of Communication, Media and Theatre, has been teaching online for more than ten years – long before online classrooms became popular during the pandemic. She explained that UWS’ early investment in online learning created an engaging and student-focused experience. “I’m most passionate about being able to teach nontraditional and traditional students who are juggling families, businesses, illness, and other challenges,” Austin said. “For many of them, if they live in a rural community or are caring for a child with special needs, having access to education online opens the door to a degree.”

Austin expressed that the university’s on-line programs are not just digital versions of a classroom, but a thoughtfully designed learning environment. She explained that her teaching is inspired by the focus on application and reflection rather than note summary, allowing students to connect their course material to the real world.

From an administrative perspective, Associate Dean of Students Jennifer Bird expresses that the university’s commitment to inclusion and accessibility goes far beyond the classroom. “Our office serves all students, whether they walk in the door or study online,” Bird said. “They have access to all the same services, from counseling to emergency grants. We’re making sure that support, advocacy, and collaboration are available regardless of a student’s mode of education.”

Bird explained that faculty and staff across departments receive continued training to ensure their teaching methods align with best practices for digital learning. She believes the future of higher education lies in meeting students where they are, offering these individuals flexibility and connection.

Austin and Bird agree that UWS is living proof that community is not confined to campus walls. As Austin noted, “Instructors are lucky, and students are really lucky that there is such a strong focus on experiential learning at UWS. Students learn by doing, applying, and connecting.”

UW-Superior is Ready to Go Solar

Maison Wiberg
mwiberg@uwsuper.edu

The University of Wisconsin-Superior’s solar array is nearing the end of its construction. The project is a big step toward making the campus more sustainable by regulating its power usage. The solar array was constructed outside Ross Hall in place of the old soccer field.

Dustin Johnson, UWS facilities director, explained the reasoning for choosing the array’s site. “Right now it’s on an old soccer field that was built on spoils from another building. So it was always lumpy, really not very safe for athletes to be on, or anybody to be on, and so it’s a perfect use for that,” Johnson said.

The array’s location also serves

another purpose: it is adjacent to the main switch on campus that allows power generated to feed directly into the campus grid. “So this way we can feed all of the power, 100% of the power, from the solar array into our grid,” Johnson said. “And that way, we’re utilizing it in all the buildings rather than just one.” Being able to feed power directly will help with the university’s expenses. According to Johnson, he’s anticipating that the project will save somewhere between 15-20% on the UWS electrical bill.

Making use of the former soccer field won’t end with the array’s installation. The UWS Sustainability Club is in discussion to build ecological projects on the site in the future. “They had talked about that being a place where we

could do maybe some wildflower planting, pollinator garden kind of stuff,” Johnson said. Although the array is tucked away on campus, students are welcomed and encouraged to visit the solar array as well as the future projects in that area.

Sustainability remains a major focus for future campus projects, and the facility team plans to fully test their electrical systems across campus, and replace old equipment with new components that positively affect energy costs.

The array is expected to be fully operational around January 2026. A digital dashboard is planned for the UWS website, to show a live feed of the solar array’s production, and a real-time calculation of how much energy the campus is saving.



Solar Array Panels outside Ross/Hawkes Dorm on campus on Oct. 28.
Photo by Maison Wiberg | Promethean

Sustainability at Bent Paddle Brewing

Gus Schupp
gschupp@uwsuper.edu

Bent Paddle Brewing of Duluth, Minn., does all it can to manage its waste and water sustainably. The brewing process consumes ingredients from local farmers. The grain Bent Paddle uses lasts only so long. Used grain, known as brewer’s spent grain (BSG), piles up with every batch.

The brewery encourages both local and regional farmers to pick up BSG from its facility for use as cattle feed. Disposal of BSG depends upon the fleet of farmers Bent Paddle works with. Transportation costs need to be factored in, since the farmers must drive long distances at times to pick up the BSG. The last thing Bent Paddle wants to do is pay to have its BSG dumped like regular trash, further adding to environmental problems. Joe Tannis, the Brew Master at Bent Paddle Brewing, jokes, “Every once in a while, we get smoke-free hamburgers.”

To overcome the challenge of sustainably managing their brewing waste, Bent Paddle is in talks with the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District (WLSSD), a waste-management company overseeing a 530-square-mile region surrounding Duluth. WLSSD is building a methane-processing facility, and it requires a steady supply of biomass fuels, like BSG.

Water use is also a primary con-

cern for Bent Paddle. The water they use comes from Lake Superior. The founders specifically located their brewery in Duluth after reviewing various locations, because “Duluth has the best water for brewing,” Tannis said, the CEO of Bent Paddle. “The softer the water,” Tannis continued, “the better, as characteristics of water from other regions can be replicated through the addition of minerals.” For instance, Bent Paddle can create water to give any batch the same qualities as beer from the U.K., southern Germany, or northern Germany by adding Calcium sulfate, Calcium chloride, or Calcium carbonate. Soft water is best, as it has almost zero total dissolved solids (TDS),

Bent Paddle receives a yearly water analysis from the city of Duluth. They have seen readings as low as 17

parts per million (ppm), and some as high as 50 ppm, which is super-soft water in the grand scheme of things. Tannis has seen water get as high as 750 ppm, which makes it difficult to brew many styles of beer. Originally, super-soft water was used in certain parts of the world, specifically in Plzeň, Czech Republic, where the Pilsner style of beer originated. For Bent Paddle’s Pilsner and Light Lager, the water (from the city of Duluth) is not adjusted in any way other than a pH adjustment. The only alteration needed for water sourced is charcoal filtering, which removes 60% of chloramines that the city adds to make the water tasteless.

When Bent Paddle first opened, they used filters that were not environmentally friendly. Those Kieselgur filters contained ground-up diatomaceous earth, bone, and other

materials that negatively impact the environment. If the filter powder gets airborne, it can cause cancer. This makes disposal problematic and dangerous. Kieselgur filters also limit the amount of hops that can be used during the brewing process, as hops tend to clog the filter media.

Bent Paddle shifted to a filtering method that saves two to three kegs of beer per batch, thus preventing hundreds of thousands of gallons of waste over a lifetime. That is all, thanks to their centrifuge.

“It was a game-changer when we got this thing,” Tannis said. “We’ve had it for ten years now.” Unlike the Kieselgur filter, there is no need to adjust the amount of hops, since the centrifuge filtration does not use a mesh that is prone to clogging and generating more waste. Since its installation, centrifuge filtration has saved Bent Paddle 1,600 kegs, or 800 barrels. Accounting for thousands if not millions of dollars of savings.

In summary, brewing beer sustainably takes time, knowledge, and skill. Tannis gained most of it not all of the skills he has today during college, while studying in Germany at the Domens Brewing and Baking Academy in Munich. Tannis also studied geology for three years at UMD, then beer took over his life. Since his studies, Tannis has been a pro brewer for 25 years and opened his first brewery in 2013.



Bent Paddle Brewing Co. Sign Duluth, Minn. on Oct. 29.
Photo by Gus Schupp | Promethean