

MAR13-2012-001641

Abstract for an Invited Paper  
for the MAR13 Meeting of  
the American Physical Society

**From Near Extinction to Academic Excellence: The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Physics Program**

GUBBI SUDHAKARAN, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

A physics department that was on the brink of extinction has been successfully resuscitated into a nationally recognized program at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UW-L). The revitalization efforts included sweeping curricular reforms, aggressive recruitment, and retention of students and faculty. The reforms included the introduction of new academic programs for the majors, new courses for non-majors, a dual-degree program in Physics and Engineering, and opportunities for undergraduate research. The department uses several recruitment techniques which include contacting high school seniors in the region and conducting outreach activities to attract students to the program. In order to sustain and enhance the quality of the program, the department carries out comprehensive assessment of its programmatic goals on a regular basis. The department is also very successful in placing students with bachelor's degrees in physics in STEM careers at an exceptional rate. The success of the program in recruiting, retention, and career placement can be attributed to a combination of aggressive advising and flexible options designed to meet the needs and career goals of each student. The retention rate in the program is high due to one-on-one advising, involving students in undergraduate research at an early stage, and a very vibrant student society. Due to these initiatives, the department has maintained its growth over the years with 160 majors currently, and 29 majors graduating during the 2011- 2012 academic year. Recently, the UW-L Physics Program was selected to receive the 2013 American Physical Society (APS) "Improving Undergraduate Physics Education Award".