Distributed by UW News Service, June 16, 2025

Link to original story: <https://www.uwsp.edu/news/cook-family-teaching-legacy-2025/>

**UW-Stevens Point graduate joins family Pointer and teaching legacy**

Written by University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point

Stephanie Cook graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point on Saturday, May 17, as a fifth-generation Pointer.

Earning a Master of Science in[**Education**](https://www.uwsp.edu/education/school-of-education/) as well as her teaching certification, Cook is following in the footsteps of her father, Perry Cook ’83, a UW-Stevens Point professor of education and director of the university’s [**Harju Center for Opportunities in Education**](https://www.uwsp.edu/education/school-of-education/harju-center-for-opportunities-in-education/). Her grandparents, Ray ’55 and Nancy Cook ’55, her great-grandmother, Marlea Thayer Cook ’30s, and step-great-great-grandmother, Lloyd Ravy Cook ’32, were all UWSP graduates, in addition to several of her aunts, uncles and cousins.

Stephanie is also a fifth-generation teacher. Lloyd and Marlea taught in one-room schools near Unity and Wisconsin Rapids for many years, Ray at P.J. Jacobs High School and Nancy at McDill Elementary in Stevens Point. Perry taught science, then earned a Ph.D. at UW-Madison before returning to UW-Stevens Point in 1994.

“It is special to be able to follow in my family’s footsteps and know I’m taking the same courses and having the same experiences,” said Stephanie.

Even with the family legacy, teaching was not the initial plan for either Perry or Stephanie.

“I knew what sacrifices my parents had to make as teachers,” Perry said of choosing his career path. “However, my sister, Cindy, challenged me to think about becoming a science teacher. She told me that teaching was a hard job, but the upsides were amazing – the ability to build positive opportunities into young lives and their families. My first teaching job was as a science department chair at Arrowhead Christian Academy in Redlands, Calif., I never looked back.”

He said he fell in love with teaching and realized he could have an even bigger impact by getting a Ph.D. to become a teacher of teachers. Today he leads courses in science teaching methods at UWSP and encourages diverse and first-generation elementary education teachers in rural education as part of the Harju Center.

Stephanie earned a bachelor’s degree in marketing and graphic design and began working as a graphic designer. Looking for a change, she began substitute teaching. After four months she decided she wanted to go back to school for her teaching certificate.

“I loved school, and education has always been in our family,” said Stephanie. “After long-term subbing, I felt like I was making a difference in the lives of my students, and I liked interacting with both children and adults and helping people learn and grow.”

Stephanie chose UW-Stevens Point because of the [**Elementary Education Accelerated Teacher Licensure Certification**](https://www.uwsp.edu/programs/certification/elementary-education-accelerated-teacher-certification/) program, which allows those with a bachelor’s degree to earn both a teaching certificate and a master’s degree in education in two years. Ironically, it was her dad who helped develop it.

“The goal of the program was to meet the needs of those wanting to teach while offering the benefit of adding a master’s degree, which offers higher salaries,” said Perry. “It’s the best of both worlds. It also offers a broad K-9 license that was the first of the Universities of Wisconsin to be certified by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.”

“The program is very well run,” said Stephanie. “The professors are knowledgeable and have the right tools to create teachers who will do well in the classroom.”

Perry shared his philosophy for UWSP’s School of Education. “We’re looking for students who have the heart for working with young people,” he said. “It’s the most important thing. We can teach everything else, but what we can’t teach is the heart. We look for hearts on, hands on, heads on, in that order.”

One of his favorite memories over the past three decades at UWSP has been supervising student teachers in the science classroom his father taught in for his first job at P.J. Jacobs High School. “I also have had the privilege to serve as the faculty advisor for CRU for the past 31 years, an interdenominational student organization on campus, that I was a part of as a student while at UWSP,” he said.

He feels very blessed to see his daughter continue the family legacy of teaching. His wife, Jean, is an instructor at Mid-State Technical College, so Stephanie grew up listening to them talk around the dinner table about what makes good teaching, classroom management and problem solving in creative and positive ways.

“There are very few careers in the world where you make a difference every single day in the lives of others,” said Perry. “As a teacher you are providing a safe learning environment and a home away from home for many of the children and young adults you teach.

“Knowing it will make a difference in their lives, encouraging them, inspiring them and have a positive impact – that is what draws you to teaching.”

Stephanie is currently seeking a position within the La Crosse and Onalaska school districts, hoping to teach kindergarten, first or second grade. She looks forward to carrying on the family teaching legacy and making a lasting impact in the classroom.

“Sometimes it’s the small wins,” she said. “When you see that something has clicked for a student, or even if they just try something new, it’s valuable and exciting as an educator.”