

**Profile of
Blugold Beginnings
University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire
2017 Regents Diversity Award Team Recipient**

Highlights from nomination materials:

- Led by Jodi Thesing-Ritter, Blugold Beginnings is an innovative pre-college program to increase enrollment and retention of underrepresented minority students in higher education; the program serves fifth graders, middle school students, and high school students, and has expanded to include a campus learning community to support students admitted to UW-Eau Claire.
- The program offers a fifth-grade campus visit, which has expanded from its pilot of 60 students eight years ago to serving 2,000 fifth graders, mentored by more than 550 UW-Eau Claire students; fifth graders are invited back for longer summer camps, and eighth graders can attend a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Day to learn about STEM fields.
- Summer programming for high school students includes a STEM camp and a transition to high school camp.
- The program serves and employs students from low-income, first-generation, and historically underrepresented groups; 70 percent of the student mentors mirror the population they serve; the use of underrepresented students as tutors/mentors in schools in regional districts has transformed the ways in which underrepresented students are viewed in the schools; they occupy places of leadership and are seen as role models in schools.
- In six years, the learning community program served more than 300 students during their college careers at UW-Eau Claire, with a focus on maximizing their experiences and graduating in four years.
- Students in the Blugold Beginnings cohort group are welcomed to campus early to jumpstart their college experience and help them to become familiar with the facilities and resources; students are paired with both upper-class student mentors and a faculty member who helps to guide them through the semester.
- Research has shown that students enrolled in the program had a higher grade point average than all students of color and first-year students not in the program. Levels of attrition for students in the learning communities are also significantly lower than those in the general student population at UW-Eau Claire. Students of color in the Blugold Beginnings program participate in study abroad programs at the same rate as majority students, reducing the participation gap in high-impact practices.

In the words of colleagues:

- “The Blugold Beginnings unit is transforming the way UW-Eau Claire supports underserved students on our campus and in our region. The participants in this program have gone on to be outstanding student leaders and are making a significant impact on our campus. And the leadership and mentorship they offer in our area schools is creating a climate of college readiness in our community that will help future students to believe college is possible for them.”
—Beth Hellwig, *Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, UW-Eau Claire*
- “Blugold Beginnings staff is all about collaboration: with the campus community, faculty from across the institution, school district staffs from our region, community agencies, and business and industry stakeholders to create a comprehensive and seamless pre-college access and college retention program. Our research on this program verifies its significant, positive impact on future students, our campus and our region.”
—James C. Schmidt, *Chancellor, UW-Eau Claire*