

**Profile of
Upward Bound Program
University of Wisconsin–River Falls
2023 Regents Diversity Award Program Recipient**

Highlights from nomination materials:

- The Upward Bound Program, started at UW-River Falls (UWRF) in 1999, is one of the longest-running programs at UWRF focused on supporting the preparation of diverse populations for college readiness.
- The program, under Director Bee Vang, cultivates a network of peers, professionals, and community members to leverage support and high-impact practices for success, providing a framework for students to firsthand experience and learn how to succeed at a college level prior to arriving on a college campus.
- The program, which serves Washington County (eastern Minnesota) with particular focus on the Washington Technology Magnet High School (formerly Arlington High School), serves 73 high school students.
- The main focus of the UWRF Upward Bound program is building positive peer support/cohorts. Participants enter into the four-year program as the 9th grade cohort and are encouraged to bond and identify supportive and trusting peer groups.
- The program also emphasizes leadership development, career/professional development, and intersection with individuals of different identities.
- UW-River Falls is required to submit an annual progress report (APR) to the U.S. Department of Education for review and approval to receive continued funding. The program has been renewed six times over 23 years, with the most recent renewal in 2022 predicated on receiving an almost 100% evaluation score on program performance.
- With intentional recruitment in mind, the program strives to serve diverse students each year. Eligibility for Upward Bound consists of first-generation and/or low-income status or high-academic-need students. In the past three progress reports, an average 91% of program participants are both first-generation and low-income.
- Upward Bound currently serves 83% Asian American and/or Southeast Asian, with the remaining population primarily Black/African American and Hispanic students. The group is currently 58% female and 42% male.
- Upward Bound's four-year curriculum includes the following topics: financial literacy, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), student loans, college exploration/visits/applications, career/major/internship exploration, ACT prep, scholarship essays, mentoring, study skills, and more.

In the words of a program alumna:

- “The positive support and motivation that I received from the program in high school prepared me for my growth in college. I learned how to build my networking skills, how to seek help, and how to build my strengths by taking risks and challenging myself with new tasks and experiences.”
—*Pather Zong Lao, first-generation college student*

In the words of colleagues:

- “I have personally met several students that came to UWRF or other UW System schools after participating in our Upward Bound program, and they expressed how important it was for them in their development.”
—*David Travis, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, UW-River Falls*
- “The Upward Bound Program has built cultural bridges and paths of academic opportunity for countless urban youth that would not otherwise have confidence to consider continuing their education beyond the secondary level.”—*Randy Zimmerman, Continuing Education Director, UW-River Falls*