

Eagle Edge

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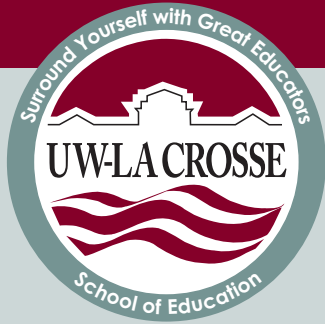
COLLABORATE. INNOVATE.

UW-LA CROSSE
EAGLES



LEARN STRONG

Scholarship created to honor UWL education alum who lived,
learned 'full-throttle' — story on page 4

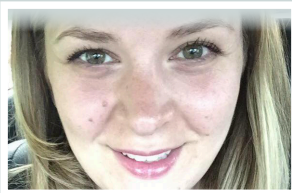


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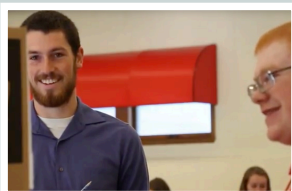
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Eagle Edge

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FROM THE DEAN

Greetings from the School of Education, Professional & Continuing Education at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

As we embark on the start of another academic year, it is an honor to share the impactful work and accomplishments of our UWL alumni, faculty, students and friends in our fall issue of the Eagle Edge. These stories are just a few of the countless examples of the tireless, dedicated individuals committed to preparing future educators who will have a lasting impact on the communities in which we work and live. It is a privilege to work with and stand alongside those involved with helping students, school partners and our communities achieve success.

In this edition you will learn more about important contributions from our team and how they have shaped what is possible through the power of education and those who dedicate their lives to it. You will learn about how the life and love of education led to one of our alumni leaving

a lasting legacy for UWL students, how our faculty are working to continue to provide high-quality experiences and education for people with disabilities, and how the effort to expand course offerings will promote teacher diversity in the La Crosse and surrounding communities.

While the stories shared in this issue highlight the progress made over the past year, we continue to look to the future - firm in the belief that the promise of education impacts the lives, schools and communities in which we serve. I hope you enjoy reading more about the School of Education, Professional & Continuing Education. Please share this newsletter with those you feel would benefit from it.

In partnership,
Marcie Wycoff-Horn Dean



Marcie Wycoff-Horn, Ph.D.

Three School of Education Alumni Named 2016 Distinguished Alumni

The Maurice O. Graff Distinguished Alumnus Award

Recognizes outstanding achievement in the lives of alumni who have brought honor and distinction to the university. Long-time administrator Maurice O. Graff instituted the honor in 1977.



PAT STEPHENS, '71, education
Extraordinary community advocate, motivator and leader

Burt and Norma Altman Teacher Education Award

Honors and recognizes outstanding educators and the significant contributions they make to children and communities. Professor Emeritus Burt Altman and his wife, Norma, long-time supporters of teacher education, created this award in 2015.



EUGENE "GENE" CONGER, '60, physical science and physical education
Accomplished career educator, coach and middle school principal



CHRISTOPHER WERNER, '99, music education with an instrumental emphasis
Innovative music educator and performer

LEARN STRONG

Scholarship created to honor
UWL education alum who lived,
learned 'full-throttle'



COVER STORY

UWL Alumnus Jason Letizia could read a several-hundred-page book in a day. He was learning Arabic on his car CD player, traveling to foreign countries and always acquiring knowledge.

"His whole life was about learning," says his sister, Megan (Letizia) Chamberlain. "There wasn't a day he didn't learn something ... and there wasn't a day that he didn't teach you."

Letizia's family didn't realize the extent of his love for learning until he died Nov. 20, 2015, and they received a bill in the mail from UW-Milwaukee where he was working on a doctorate. They were unaware he had started the degree despite being in and out of the hospital and awaiting a second liver transplant.

Letizia's health problems started with a Crohn's Disease diagnosis at age 15, and continued with many other medical issues, including the need for two liver transplants. Despite his health, he had a "full-throttle" approach to life and learning, says his brother, Justin.

That's why it is so fitting that a scholarship was recently created in Jason's name that will help UWL students learn for generations to come.

Jason Letizia, '03, earned a degree in education, broad field social studies, before continuing on to earn a master's degree. "His UWL years were probably the best of years of his life," says his brother, Justin.

The Jason Letizia Learn Strong Scholarship will award \$1,000 annually to a UWL senior majoring in secondary education. The title “Learn Strong” reflects Jason’s full-throttle approach — one he applied while earning his undergraduate degree in education at UWL.

At UWL Jason took full advantage of involvement opportunities on campus by serving on Student Senate, working as a resident assistant, studying abroad and more.

Jason didn’t just love learning, he dedicated his career to helping others learn. He was a full-time teacher at Oak Creek High School for 10 years.

“We continue to hear from students he taught, teachers he worked with and college friends,” says Richard, Jason’s father. “We didn’t realize all the people he touched in his life.”

“Jason would have smiled to learn a scholarship at UWL will continue his life’s work of inspiring learning,” says Justin.

“To know that his legacy would be continuing — I think he would think that was the best thing that he could ever wish for,” adds Megan.

“His whole life was about learning. There wasn’t a day he didn’t learn something ... and there wasn’t a day that he didn’t teach you,”
— Jason’s sister, Megan (Letizia) Chamberlain.

Scholarship starts with donation from a college friend

College friend and roommate Marc Gall, ’03, donated \$25,000 to create the scholarship to honor Jason Letizia as part of a \$50,000 donation to the UWL Foundation.

Gall saw Letizia’s commitment to helping others throughout college, particularly while serving on Student Senate. “He spent a lot of time giving back to the university and ensuring that he left the place better than when he started,” says Gall.

Letizia continued his commitment to serving others when he became a teacher, adds Gall. “The scholarship aims to build on Letizia’s legacy of serving others while supporting educators who are worthy of more recognition,” says Gall.

Marc Gall, ’03



The UWL scholarship isn’t the first to honor Jason Letizia. The family also started a scholarship at Oak Creek High School where he taught. Two scholarships were awarded this past May to graduating seniors.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

\$1.25 million

UWL receives grant to continue adapted physical education teacher preparation



A UWL adapted physical education student assists a child from the community during a class in Mitchell Hall. UWL has received a \$1.25 million competitive grant to continue its nationally-recognized work preparing adapted physical education teachers for schools across the country.

UWL has received a \$1.25 million competitive grant to continue its nationally recognized work preparing adapted physical education teachers for schools across the country.

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services grant provides fellowships and professional development for graduate and undergraduate students pursuing teaching and leadership careers in adapted physical education.

Professor Garth Tymeson, grant director from the Department of Exercise and Sport Science, says the project will fund full-time graduate and undergraduate students, as well as current teachers returning to campus for adapted physical education professional development during the summer.

Abbie Lee, an instructor in the Department of Exercise and Sport Science and coordinator of the new award, says the project continues the work of another grant that ends in June.

“The grant will assist many future teachers to achieve state licensure in adapted physical education and assist school districts throughout the country who need effective teachers to serve students with disabilities in both inclusive and specialized education settings,” she says.

The five-year award is one of the largest grants UWL has received. Students experience adapted physical education

and sport programs sponsored by UWL’s Center on Disability Health and Adapted Physical Activity in the Department of Exercise and Sport Science.

About the UWL adapted physical education teacher preparation program

Adapted physical education is one of many highly regarded teacher education programs in the UWL School of Education. The program prepares future professionals to meet the needs of students with disabilities in PK-12 schools. UWL offers both undergraduate and graduate study in adapted physical education with some alumni pursuing doctorates to teach in higher education. Wisconsin is one of only 13 states with an add-on teaching license for adapted physical education specialists. Current enrollment includes about 40 undergraduates and 10 graduate students. Graduate students in the program come from throughout the United States.

School districts actively pursue UWL adapted physical education teachers to meet their staff needs. UWL adapted physical education alumni are hired throughout the country. In the last eight years, they have received teaching positions in Alaska, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin. As many as 12 graduates in the past six years have been employed in Virginia’s Fairfax County, the 13th largest school district in the country.



Students in UWL's nationally recognized adapted physical education program work with children from the community as part of their studies. The \$1.25 million U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services grant provides fellowships and professional development for graduate and undergraduate students pursuing teaching and leadership careers in adapted physical education.

ALUMNI PROFILE



Author Kelly Anne Blount, '06, earned her degree in education with a minor in broad field social studies. She was Kelly Anne Flynn when she attended UWL. She later went on to complete her master's degree in Early Childhood Special Education at Old Dominion University.

A big screen succe

Alumna author writes horror, thr

Author Kelly Anne Blount, '06, still remembers a comment written on one of her college English essays: "Your future is so bright you'll need sunglasses." Today Blount's future is looking bright — in an eerie sort of way.

Producers have purchased the rights to adapt two of Blount's adult horror/thriller novels into films or TV shows. The young alumna has had three other books published, and has become a popular author on the website Wattpad, a free online platform for reading and sharing stories. Her book "Captured," one of the two that has been optioned for film, has garnered more than 12 million readings on Wattpad.

Blount says she was in the right place at the right time when she began writing her first book "Grishma" in 2012, which later became an Amazon best-selling novel. The process from writing to publishing took only six months. She attributes much of that success to a critique group she joined, which pushed her to produce 20 pages for review every two weeks. At the time, she was also critiquing other writers' work and teaching preschoolers full-time.

Blount says it paid to have a strong writing background from undergraduate teaching and general education courses at UWL.

"From the structure of the courses to the highly-skilled professors, they all played a huge part in not only sharpening my writing skills, but also making me feel confident in writing," she says.

Blount points to two UWL professors in particular, Bradley Butterfield, English, who wrote the comment about the sunglasses, and Professor Emeritus Robert Richardson, Educational Studies, who taught "the most difficult class of my entire life," says Blount.

"Even at the graduate level, nothing held even a small, dimly-lit candle to his course," she explains.

SS

iller novels being considered for movie adaptations

“Kelly fully invested in the [class] experience! Because of her determination and focus, she expanded her knowledge, skills, and dispositions. I told my students that investment in undergraduate studies would reap benefits in their professional life. Kelly trusted the professor, her peers, the process, and our multiple authors. She held her breath in anxious anticipation of my reviews; now, she breathes in eager anticipation of a nation of appreciators.”

— Robert Richardson, Ph.D.

Richardson’s high expectations forced Blount to fine tune her writing.

“Even to this day, I think back to lessons that I learned from turning papers in to him and holding my breath that all the citations were correct, and I didn’t have a comma in the wrong spot,” she says. “I learned so so much about writing from Dr. Richardson. It was incredible.”

Find out more about Blount’s books

Kelly Anne Blount’s books “Under” and “Captured” have been optioned for film, meaning producers have purchased the rights to them. The producer who optioned “Captured” also worked on the hit television show “Dexter,” and was the production supervisor on the first season of “Goliath.” Her dark thriller “Under” was optioned by Komixx Entertainment, which has had success on many platforms including the BBC.

Blount’s book “Grishma” is the first in her three-book series of young adult fantasy novels published by Limitless Publishing. Learn more about Blount’s books at www.kellyanneblount.com. She also has books available for free on Wattpad at www.wattpad.com.



“Even to this day I think back to lessons that I learned from turning papers in to him and holding my breath that all the citations were correct and I didn’t have a comma in the wrong spot. I learned so so much about writing from Dr. Richardson. It was incredible.”

— Kelly Anne Blount, '06, Amazon best-selling author

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Problem solvers in the elementary mathematics classroom

This fall, Kindergarten teachers will transform the task of *finding two numbers that add to eight* into a robust problem solving task: *Mrs. Weaver is going to bring 8 pumpkins to school to decorate her classroom. Some are small and some are large. How many of each size could Mrs. Weaver bring to school? Use pictures, words, and numbers to show your thinking.*

This type of task makeover provides students with the opportunity to engage in mathematical problem solving. As a new school year begins, teachers around the country are seeking these high-level mathematical tasks that engage their students in rich activities. Although there are many phrases that resonate with teachers around problem solving such as reasoning, productive struggle, or sense-making, there is often limited resources for teachers to implement such high-level tasks.

Professors Jenni McCool and Jenn Kosiak, two mathematics educators at UW-La Crosse, in collaboration with Kim



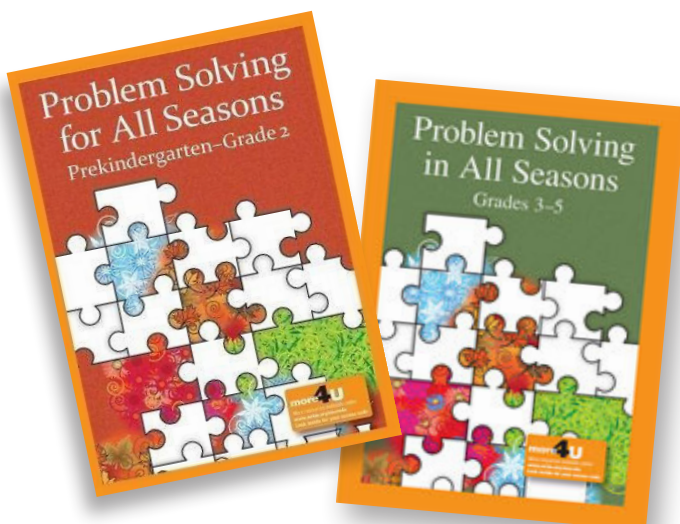
Jenn Kosiak, Ph.D.



Jenni McCool, Ph.D.

Markworth, Ph.D., Western Washington University, sought to bring problem solving resources to elementary teachers across the country. With their recent National Council of Teachers of Mathematics publications, “Problem Solving in All Seasons – Grades PK-2” and “Problem Solving in All Seasons – Grades 3-5”, teachers will have a collection of relevant and authentic tasks; as well as instructional strategies to support the implementation of these tasks in their own classroom.

These books provide teachers more than 60 tasks that allow students to investigate the structure of mathematics in the context of seasonal themes. For example, pre-kindergarten students will explore spatial relationships for Fire Prevention Week, while second grade students will build a better understanding of place value through a recycling cans activity for Earth Day. In the later grades, third grade students will investigate multiplication using arrays as they develop a plan to arrange marching bands in equal groups for a Labor Day Parade, while fourth grade students will visualize equivalent fractions in a Flag Day celebration. No matter what the season, readers will find a relevant and engaging problem solving task for elementary students.



Partnerships that pay off

Each year the School of Education honors valuable partners in education through the UW-La Crosse Cooperating Teacher Appreciation Grant program. The grants are awarded to teachers who have provided valuable experiences and powerful mentoring for UWL teacher candidates. It is a small token of appreciation for the amazing work they do for not only UWL students, but also for children in the community. We thank them for believing in the power of education and paying it forward to the future educators of UWL.

“We are so grateful for this opportunity for our students, along with the opportunities that this will provide for the university students that work within our classrooms — working to meet the needs of EACH AND EVERY student!”

— *State Road Elementary School,
La Crosse, WI*

“With cuts in education funding, it is harder and harder to get much needed items for our classrooms. This grant is one avenue that allows teachers to get some of those items.”

— *Bangor Elementary School, Bangor WI*

“I am thrilled to be able to use this mini grant to expand on a project that I have been working on...focusing on Social Justice. We are going to purchase more books for our library so that children can learn and share about social justice issues through literacy. Over the last couple of years the number of texts released that focus on important issues like racism, sexism, poverty, pollution and many other important topics has increased and with the help of this grant we can get those new books in the hands of my fourth grade students. In my heart I know that some of my students will become better citizens and family members because of their access to these stories and the lessons held within.”

— *Northern Hills Elementary School,
Onalaska WI*

“Thank you so much for the grant for books for my fifth-grade classroom. I have taught first, second and third grade for 29 years. I have built a great classroom library for younger children, but I need to build the library for older students. Our reader’s workshop asks us to have children reading books at their levels. Purchasing these books will allow me to provide the children with many levels and genres. The ultimate goal is to develop a love for reading in each child. Your grant will help achieve this goal! Thank you so much!”

— *Viking Elementary School, Holmen WI*

DIVERSITY



Students in the Grow Our Own Teacher Diversity Program participate in class discussion.

GROW OUR OWN

Bridging racial and cultural gaps through a more diverse teacher force.

“It is not just a job when you are touching people’s lives; it’s much more than that.”

That’s what Chicago native Bethany Brent, Ph.D., says of her role as Multicultural Education Advisor and Recruiter for the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Having lived in La Crosse for just 18 months, Brent is already making a big impact on campus and in the community. “One of my primary responsibilities is to create a long-term program that will support teacher diversity, and I’ve been able to do that with the Grow Our Own Teacher Diversity program,” says Brent, launched the initiative this fall along with program co-creator Antoiwana Williams, director of Multicultural Student Services at UWL.

In partnership with La Crosse and Winona school districts, the Grow Our Own, Teacher Diversity Program is designed to provide tuition-free teacher training to community members of color, ages 22 to 50. Qualified participants then must teach in the district for a minimum of three years.

Brent notes that community members of color share cultural connections and understand the challenges of minority students. “And in that sense, this particular population is more likely to bridge a racial and cultural gap between the community and the schools.”

Everyone wins

Increased teacher diversity benefits Caucasian students, too. “Having teachers of color in the classroom helps dispel some myths and stereotypes that tend to become a dominant narrative about people of color,” adds Brent. “And they are able to talk about sensitive subjects with Caucasian students who may have little exposure to different cultural realities outside of the classroom.”

In La Crosse, people of color make up less than five percent of the teacher force. The Winona School District has no teachers of color, despite a growing minority student population. Brent commends both districts for working to improve teacher diversity, something she feels will change lives.

The community also benefits by investing in a segment of the population that may feel unappreciated. “Since I’ve been here, there has been some racial strife in the La Crosse community,” notes Brent. “When community members learn that there are organizations, businesses, municipalities who want to see them succeed ... it makes them feel that people want them to be here. And that has a significant impact.”

Published in the Coulee Region Women’s Magazine June-July 2016, issue written by Leah Call.

FACULTY HONORED

Eagle Teaching Excellence Award

UWL students have spoken. They sent in nominations and six UWL faculty members have been selected for the 2016 Eagle Teaching Excellence Award, previously called the Provost's Teaching Award. The award recognizes excellence in teaching. Among the six recipients was:

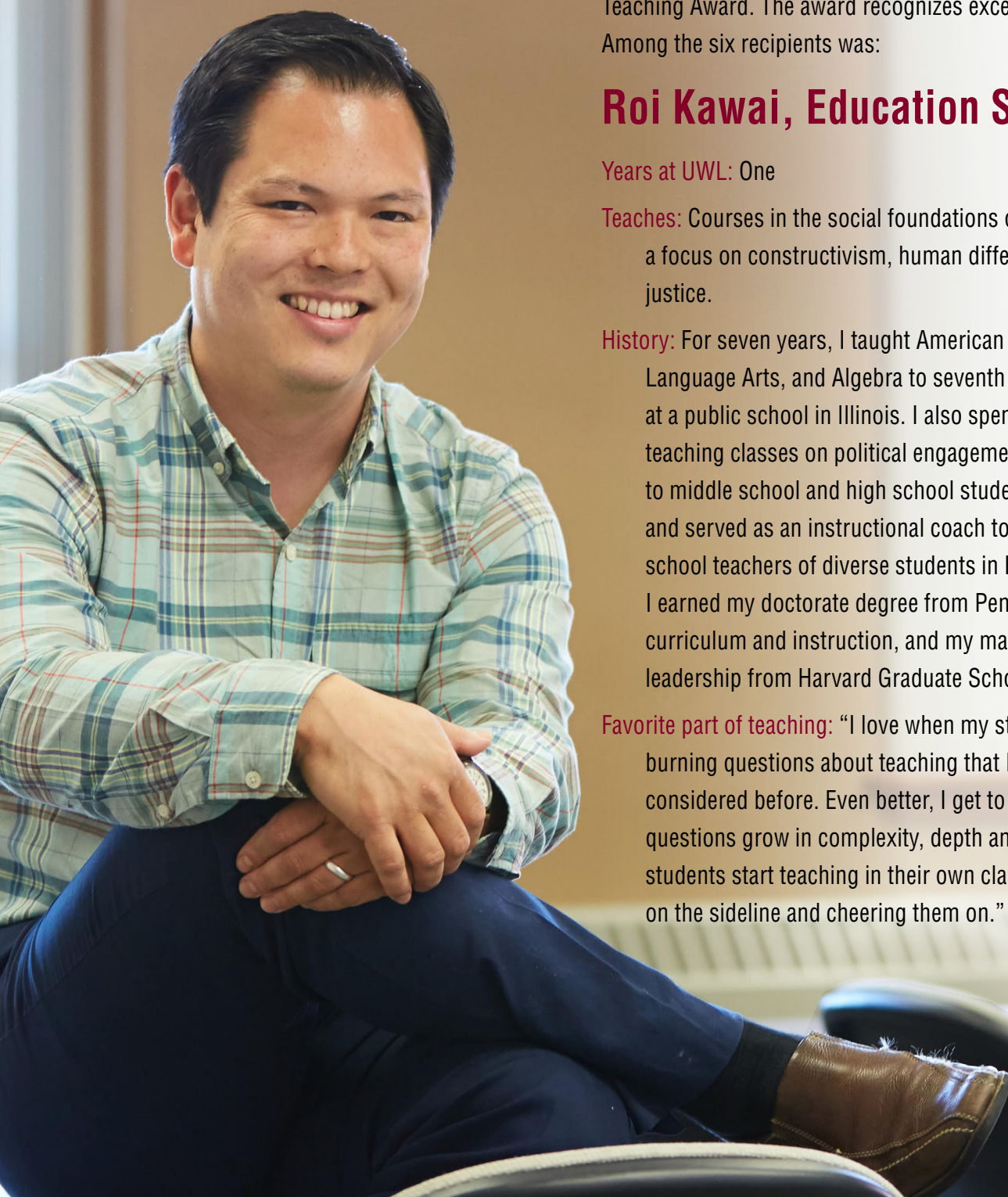
Roi Kawai, Education Studies

Years at UWL: One

Teaches: Courses in the social foundations of education with a focus on constructivism, human differences and social justice.

History: For seven years, I taught American History, English Language Arts, and Algebra to seventh and eighth graders at a public school in Illinois. I also spent three summers teaching classes on political engagement and social change to middle school and high school students in Chicago, and served as an instructional coach to pre-service middle school teachers of diverse students in Boston for two years. I earned my doctorate degree from Penn State University in curriculum and instruction, and my master's degree in school leadership from Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Favorite part of teaching: "I love when my students ask fantastic, burning questions about teaching that I have never considered before. Even better, I get to observe how these questions grow in complexity, depth and color. Then, as my students start teaching in their own classrooms, I love sitting on the sideline and cheering them on."



SCHOLARSHIP

Honoring educators

Scholarship honors one special teacher, many more pursuing education careers

Jim Ford started a scholarship to honor his father 36 years ago. He did it because his dad — Charles “Ben” Ford, ’35, “was a wonderful educator and under appreciated — in my judgment,” notes Jim.

Ben was a long-term teacher and coach in several school districts, including the Colfax School District in northern Wisconsin.

The Charles E. Ford scholarship was established in 1980 before Ben died. It has continued to recognize people pursuing careers in education for more than three decades.

And some of the UWL student scholarship recipients have very closely followed in Ben’s career path.

The first scholarship recipient has now taught and coached in the Colfax School District for more than 30 years. Tim Devine, ’84, still recalls rather vividly receiving the Charles E. Ford scholarship as a UWL freshman. It helped him with that monthly check he wrote for \$87.07 to pay off his student loan.

“You remember that amount when you pay it 120 times,” says Devine. “Although the cost of a college education was much more affordable when I went to school, it was still a costly venture. The Ford Scholarship helped to offset my financial burden associated with college.”

Devine calls receiving the scholarship one of the most amazing memories from his UWL days. But he almost didn’t attend the scholarship banquet because he wasn’t expecting to receive anything.



During the Sunday, April 24 scholarship banquet, Tim Devine and Jim and Judy Ford met for the first time in person. From left are: Judy Ford, Tim Devine and Jim Ford.



Tim Devine, '84, a physical education and health education major, never met Jim during the 1980 scholarship reception, but he did meet his mother, Marian Ford. He later met Ben, who was ill at the time, in his home. Here Marian Ford and Devine are pictured together during the 1980 event.

He was swayed to attend by his roommate and the promise of food and drink.

“What college kid do you know who turns down free food?,” jokes Devine. “When my name was announced, all I remember is my roommate laughing and the sense of relief I felt for wearing something nicer than a T-shirt and blue jeans.”

Devine received a scholarship for \$500 that night, but that summer he received a letter from UWL's Foundation Office informing him that his scholarship would increase to \$1,000 because the Ford family decided to double the amount after reading the thank you letter he wrote to Mr. and Mrs. Ford.

“Although the cost of a college education was much more affordable when I went to school, it was still a costly venture. The Ford Scholarship helped to offset my financial burden associated with college.”

— Tim Devine, '84

“Needless to say, I was very excited with this news,” he says.

Because Devine understood the impact of that scholarship in his life, he didn't hesitate when asked to give back to his alma mater by reviewing scholarship applications. He was shocked when he coincidentally received the Charles E. Ford scholarship to review this spring. Today the scholarship also honors Jim's mother, Marian, who earned her elementary education teaching certificate from La Crosse State in the late 1950s.

Reviewing applications has reconnected Devine with the Ford family who are now able to see who scholarship recipients have become in 30 years time. Devine and Jim met for the first time at the Sunday, April 24, scholarship reception.

Jim says it has been a special joy to connect with Devine who “exemplifies what we have envisioned as an outcome from the scholarships.”

Jim and his wife, Judy, recently increased the scholarship amount so that three, \$5,000 scholarships will be awarded for 2016-17. Jim says his father would likely be surprised, but also pleased and proud at the difference the scholarship has made in the lives of students.

“We feel strongly about training the best possible students for careers in education,” says Jim.

ALUMNI

Top of the class

Married alums bring Boscobel classrooms together

Jennifer Ekiss' third grade class had a rare opportunity in May — they were going on a trip to Mexico. At least, that's what Ekiss, '13, told her students.

In reality, the Boscobel Elementary school students were taking a much shorter trip. They would walk to the high school to learn about Mexican culture from students in an upper level Spanish course taught by Mark Ekiss, Jennifer's husband.

"It was exactly the final project I was looking for my students to do," says Mark, '14, who's wrapping up his first year of teaching. "I learned in college the best way to learn is to teach someone, so I've wanted to see my students teaching younger students."

The high school students had already completed a Spanish oral presentation on topics, such as fashion, festivals, sports and the environment. The challenge for this presentation was to keep it interesting and understandable for the younger kids.



Mark Ekiss, '14

CLICK IMAGE TO WATCH "TOP OF THE CLASS"



Jennifer Ekiss, '13, listens to the student presentation to her third-grade class.

"This really reinforced what we've been talking about in the classroom and will hopefully get the students looking forward to learning Spanish," says Jennifer.

Jennifer is a recipient of this year's UWL School of Education Early Career Educator Awards. Five teachers in their first five years of teaching were honored during the School of Education's scholarship night in April.

"I don't think I could have had an experience like this [UWL] anywhere else," she says.

