

UWL COLLEGE OF ARTS, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

CAPSTONE



YOUR KEY TO GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP FALL 2022



STEPPING IN

Dance now dazzling theatre



Valuing visual, performing arts

New performance dance program added
to the already strong offerings

Providing a specific school designation for the departments of Art, Music and Theatre occurred during the 2018-19 academic year. Beginning in Summer 2019 the School of Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) became an important part of the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities.

VPA is located in the newly named Truman T. Lowe Center for the Arts. It provides both excellent learning experiences for students across campus interested in the arts, as well as a regional cultural center for the larger public community to enjoy performances, concerts, recitals and exhibits.

I also am very pleased to announce a new performance dance program beginning this fall semester in the newly renamed Department of Theatre and Dance. This addition is significant because it adds another art form for student learning, performance and technical work. We look forward to watching this new program grow and develop in the coming years.

This issue of Capstone focuses on activities and initiatives in the CASSH School of Visual and Performing Arts. Excitement on campus about growing opportunities in the arts is palpable and I believe you also will be impressed with the very good work of our students and faculty.

I encourage you to attend a play, performance, concert, recital or exhibit in the coming year. Please visit uwlax.edu/vpa to learn more about VPA on the UWL campus.

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "KARUNKEL". The signature is stylized and written in all caps.

Karl R. Kunkel, Dean

College of Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities

YOUR KEY TO GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP
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ON THE COVER: Ashley Dobrogosz is bringing her passion to dance to UWL as the leader of the new dance minor in the recently renamed Department of Theatre and Dance.



How to help



Celebrating a life in art



Fulbright scholar



Full steam ahead

CASSH DEPARTMENTS

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Military Science

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Psychology

Race, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Sociology

Student Affairs Administration

Theatre and Dance



‘MEANT TO MOVE’

Students, faculty embrace new dance minor

blend of artistry and athleticism.

That's how Ashley Dobrogosz describes dance, an activity she fell in love with as a child learning ballet, jazz, modern and tap.

Now, she is bringing her passion to students at UW-La Crosse, leading the new dance minor under the recently renamed Department of Theatre and Dance.

"What I enjoy most about teaching dance is the opportunity to share my art with others," says Dobrogosz, who worked with dance companies before transitioning to teaching full time. "Dance has given me so much: a passion, a career and a community. I love teaching an already skilled dancer, but I also love teaching a beginning dancer. No matter the skill level, I am always reminded that humans are meant to move. Whether that means in professional settings or recreational ways, everyone is meant to move their body."

The minor begins with entry-level courses on ballet, musical theater and the foundations of dance. It progresses to more advanced courses on dance history, composition, improvisation and more. Department leaders expect to offer three to four dance courses each semester, with the hope that students could complete the program in two years.

Implementing a brand-new program presents many challenges, Dobrogosz says, but it's part of what drew her to the job.

"For some people, that might seem a little intimidating. But for me, it sounded like an exciting opportunity," she says. "I feel very supported by the theatre faculty.



Ashley Dobrogosz

I have also had faculty in other disciplines reach out to share their excitement and talk about prospects of collaboration. This is exciting to me because it shows the program is supported by others, which could create collaborative experiences for our students.

"We have an opportunity to make something special," she adds. "Dance connects all people, not just a 'trained' dancer. We must start by spreading the word about this new program and form a community of not only theatre students but hopefully dancers in other departments."

Former Chair Joe Anderson and current Chair Laurie Kinckman were eager to add dance to their department after the retirement of an Exercise and Sport Science faculty member specializing in dance.

Absorbing the previous dance technique offerings was imperative for musical theatre majors looking to complete their program, as well as design and stage management students striving to be fully prepared upon graduation. However, Anderson and Kinckman took it a step further by creating the new minor.

"Not only will this make our musical theatre emphasis much stronger and in line with programs

across the country, but it will also afford many students — theatre and non-theatre alike — the opportunity to study something they love," Anderson says. "Many, many students have been taking dance since they were very young. This will provide them with a creative outlet minoring in something that not only brings them great joy, but continues to develop the skills of discipline, creativity, physical development, dedication and the mind-body connection."

Judging by fall semester enrollment, the interest in dance is not limited to theatre students, Kinckman adds.

"Students with majors including psychology, communication studies, therapeutic recreation, English, marketing, and even the dual-degree program in physics and engineering are enrolled," she says. "The creative work is appealing across campus."

Dobrogosz hopes to be a resource for all students, whether or not they take one of her classes. Dance, she says, is something all people can carry and use throughout their lives.

The new minor is designed to promote that lifelong skill while drawing even more students to the broader world of theatre arts.

"I think the accomplishments of the Theatre and Dance Department show that we have something special here, and students use their education in numerous, successful ways," Dobrogosz says. "The addition of dance is not only a logical one, but a necessary one. I hope our growth brings more art and opportunities to the UWL community."



Justin Schmitz is known for his innovative and heartfelt work with the theater and dance program at Washington, D.C.'s Gallaudet University.

STEPPING INTO: THE SPOTLIGHT

Theatre, art alums among UWL's distinguished

Two VPA alumni were among the five recognized as 2022 distinguished alumni this fall. They included:

Justin Schmitz, '11, Rada Distinguished Alumni Award, which recognizes alumni who have graduated within the last 20 years, achieved professional distinction and taken part in humanitarian activities.

Mary Lee Vance, '79 & '83, Burt and Norma Altman Teacher Education Award, which honors and recognizes outstanding educators and the significant contributions they make to children and communities.

Justin Schmitz is a fast-rising star in theatrical hotbed of D.C.



e's impressive with his creative, cutting-edge sound design for theater. In fact, he's so creative

that he's even making waves with those who are deaf, allowing them to experience and enjoy audible theatrics in new, bold ways.

Justin Schmitz, who started his early theatrical profession fine-tuning sound on the stage of UWL's Toland Theatre, has taken his talents to Washington, D.C., the country's second largest theater city.

David Kilpatrick, director of education programs and productions for D.C.'s John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, says Schmitz stands out for his distinction in sound design, as well as his fearless and collaborative exploration of how sound design affects audiences and storytelling. He says Schmitz's bridge-building savviness is helping him shape what's ahead for the creative theater field.

"He has emerged as a young leader on a national scale in theatrical sound design," notes Kilpatrick. "He is one with the right mix of professionalism

and intelligence to make a difference in shaping the field's future."

Schmitz is also known for his innovative and heartfelt work with the theater and dance program at Washington, D.C.'s Gallaudet University.

Ethan Sinnott, professor and director of the program, says Gallaudet is fortunate to have Schmitz, whom he calls a fast-rising star in the theatrical hotbed of D.C., be so supportive of its programming. He appreciates Schmitz's keen interest in developing strategies to synthesize sound design for deaf theater.

"As an artistic collaborator, Mr. Schmitz has always exhibited a sensitivity to the deaf-oriented nature of Gallaudet and its community in his pursuit of the seemingly paradoxical challenge of designing sound for deaf theatre," explains Sinnott.

As a freelance sound designer and composer, Schmitz has earned numerous awards. He takes his craft to numerous theater projects in many states.

More about Schmitz

- Innovator, leader in theatrical sound design, valued partner and collaborator for Gallaudet University theater and dance programs.
- Freelance sound designer and composer in the Washington, D.C. area and regionally across the nation including the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.
- Awarded John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the Kenan Institute Fellowship 2015-16; Carnegie Hall performer; Helen Hays nominations; others.
- Bachelor's in theater design and technology, 2011; Master of Fine Arts, University of North Carolina School of the Arts, 2015.

Cover story continued on next page

STEPPING IN

Vance used personal relationship with award's founder to find success

The Burt and Norma Altman Teacher Education Award is particularly meaningful for Mary Lee Vance because Burt was one of her mentors during her time at UWL.

M

ary Lee Vance remembers her first day as Professor Burt Altman's graduate assistant.

Nervous about returning to her alma mater for a master's program after a negative experience in a different program, the '79 art major was intimidated when she was assigned to work for the well-known teacher education professor.

After an initial hiccup because Vance didn't have a bachelor's degree in education, she was determined to be the best assistant he had ever had.

She succeeded. In September, Vance will receive the university's top alumni educator award named for Altman.

Vance had plenty of opportunities to learn under Altman. As part of her grad assistantship duties, she would teach sections of his human relations classes. Even though she was an introvert, Vance grew to develop the comfort and skills necessary to teach and present, with guidance from Altman — tools she would use throughout her career.

Altman mentored Vance out of the classroom, too, providing social networking tips. Vance recalls being invited to his house for a cocktail party and initially not wanting to attend. Eventually agreeing to do so, she expanded her comfort zone.

Altman and his wife, Norma, eased her jitters. Teacher Education Professor Kent Koppelman and his wife, Jan, also made Vance feel at ease in social situations where

Vance developed additional vital networking skills.

"All four made a deep impression on me and were highly instrumental in my ability to be as successful as I have been in my higher education career," says Vance. "Were it not for the support they provided me, their belief in my abilities, their reinforcement and their friendships I might never have completed my graduate program."

Over the years, Vance's passion for removing educational barriers for people of color and individuals with disabilities has grown and continues to inspire others.

"Few individuals have put more time and energy into figuring out how to remove the barriers set before these individuals," says Paul Grossman, retired chief civil rights attorney with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights in San Francisco.

Vance is also known for her efforts supporting international adoption.

"Mary Lee has been an inspiration to adoptees over the years and is a respected and influential leader in the adoptee community, as well as the broader Korean community, both nationally and internationally," says Holt International Vice President Susan Soonkeum Cox.

More about Vance

- Transformational educator, leader, writer, presenter and editor of four books and numerous

research articles, passion for removing educational barriers for people of color and individuals with disabilities.

- Office of Equal Opportunity Interim Director and Services for Students with Disabilities Director, California State University Sacramento; previous student services and adjunct faculty positions at Orange Coast College, University of California Berkeley, Purdue University-Calumet, University of Montana, UW-Superior, George Mason University and Iowa State University.
- 2007 UWL Parker Distinguished Multicultural Alumni Award; 2012 Association on Higher Education and Disability Professional Recognition Award; others.
- Bachelor's in art, 1979; Master's of Education-Professional Development, 1983; doctorate, Michigan State University, 1993.

NOMINATE DESERVING ALUMNI

Nominate deserving UWL alumni for the university's distinguished alumni awards. Simply fill out the [nomination form](#); the Alumni Office will contact nominees. Nominations are accepted throughout the year. They must be received by Oct. 1 to be considered for the award the following year.

Cover story continued on next page



Classrooms accommodate sessions during Creative Imperatives.

Stepping into...Creative Imperatives

Annual event dazzles, enlightens

UWL's annual "Creative Imperatives" continues to dazzle and enlighten audiences. This year's School of Visual and Performing Arts focused on the theme, "Adaptation: Transformation, Resilience and Impact" Feb. 28 and March 1. Performances from faculty and students in the Art, Communication Studies, English, Music and Theatre Arts departments celebrated the constantly evolving nature of the arts. In 2023, the event will be called ArtsFest.

 **See 2022 Creative Imperatives performances and more.**

Stepping into...An art installation

Leslie Iwai's installation, *Winter's Spring: An Ältere Garten*, features 20' tulips, vinyl birds, rabbits, paper carrots, a mobile sculpture, and more. The art garden asks viewers to contemplate how nature and humans have inherent hidden potential.

"Plants that lie dormant for months can burst to life in spring and I've also witnessed humans transform," Iwai shares. "As we age, it's possible for the innocence of childhood wonder to reemerge and replenish the tenderness hidden by the weight of years. Vibrant life can hide itself under the cover of snowy hair and weathered skin."

Ältere Garten merges vibrant color, sculpture, imagery, and materials that recall the simplicity of kindergarten to celebrate the fragile beauty of elders in the winter seasons of their lives. At a time in history when elders are physically vulnerable, Iwai asks us to honor the hints of spring in the depths of winter. **View it.**



The third floor art gallery holds sessions during Creative Imperatives. This image features work from 2022.



An original UWL play about 9-11 has won numerous awards from The National Committee of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival.

Stepping into...National spotlight

Kennedy Center honors original play about 9-11

A national group has put an original UWL play center stage.

The National Committee of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival has honored the Department of Theatre Arts with several awards for the original documentary drama, “Severe Clear: September 11 from Memory to History.” Written by UWL faculty and students, the production premiered on campus in Toland Theatre in October 2020.

“This type of national recognition not only speaks to the incredible

work our faculty and students are producing but also sheds positive national light on the university as a whole,” says Joe Anderson, Theatre Arts.

The UWL production received numerous Citizen Artist Awards that recognize programs in higher education using theatrical production. Among UWL’s citations:

- Special Achievement in the Production of a New Work
- Special Achievement in the Production of a Devised or Company-Generated Work

- Special Achievement in Direction by Faculty Artists, citing Assistant Professor Greg Parmeter
- Special Achievement in Ensemble Performance



Find out more about the creation of the award-winning production in the documentary

This isn’t the only recent recognition for the Theatre Arts Department. In spring 2021, national theatre blog OnStage named it the best theatre program in Wisconsin.



“Everything happens for a reason.”
“She is in a better place.”
“Where she is she wouldn’t come back — even if she could.”

Dena Huisman heard those cliché condolence messages after her mother’s sudden death at age 61. While well intentioned, the blanket phrases shared at her mother’s funeral began to set her jaw in a clench. She recalls lashing out at one of her mother’s friends.

“My mom’s friend very kindly said, ‘Just trust that God has a plan.’ And I said, ‘Yeah, you know what — Then God’s plan really sucks!’”

Since that encounter, Huisman has spent more than nine years researching grief and social support. She advises people to skip the blanket statements and, instead, cater their support communication to the individual person and the specific relationship.

Huisman shared her personal story and research to help others offer social support during an April TEDxUWLaCrosse presentation.



UWL Associate Professor of Communication Studies Dena Huisman studies grief and social support.

How to help someone who is grieving

Research shows most people believe themselves to have a broad network of

people who they could call to provide social support. But research also shows that the enacted support people receive is not seen as very helpful. Most people will say it is only moderately helpful or harmful, explains Huisman.

The gap is where the opportunity lies. Huisman offers a renewed toolkit to help support friends and family in need.

Huisman advises people to avoid generalized condolence messages. Instead, they should focus their support communication on the individual.

The human brain has what psychologists call a schema system that allows people to neatly store information about every close relationship they have.

This filing cabinet is the greatest resource in moments of not knowing what to say to someone who is grieving.

HOW TO HELP

Communication Studies professor shares personal experience and research to better support someone who lost a loved one

Ask yourself questions such as

- Which friend?
- What do I know about this friend?
- How do they organize their world?
- What is their belief system?
- Have they experienced anything like this before?



Learn more about Huisman's talk.



Watch Huisman's full presentation

Huisman's book...

"Social Power and Communicating Social Support: How Stigma and Marginalization Impact Our Ability to Help" should publish in late 2022. Find it at [taylorandfrancis.com](https://www.taylorandfrancis.com) or [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).



Shaundel Spivey earned two degrees from UWL: a bachelor's majoring in political science and minoring in criminal justice in 2012, and master's in Student Affairs Administration in 2015.

REFLECTING ON YOU

Spivey shares more authentic equity, diversity and inclusion work


"When you point a finger, you have three fingers pointing back at you."

It's an expression Shaundel Spivey, '12 & '15, heard frequently as a child when he and his siblings would get in trouble. They were always pointing to assign the blame. However, usually self-reflection was needed to move forward.

Today Spivey hasn't forgotten the importance of looking inward instead of assigning blame. The executive

director of the local organization **B.L.A.C.K.** challenged a group of campus and community members to use a pointed finger as a tool to re-think how they do equity, inclusion and diversity work.

He spoke during a **TEDxUWLa Crosse** presentation in spring.

A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is sitting on a black metal bench outdoors. She is wearing a maroon long-sleeved shirt and has her hands resting on her lap. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred green landscape with trees.

UWL Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice Associate Professor Dawn Norris has been named a Fulbright Scholar. She will travel overseas during the spring 2023 semester to study job impacts in the Czech Republic.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR BECOMES FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR

A European trip to celebrate a 10th wedding anniversary sparked the dream of a Fulbright scholarship— which will soon become a reality.

Associate Professor Dawn Norris and her husband visited Prague, Czech Republic, in 2019 upon the recommendation of a student. They loved the culture, architecture and history.

The trip left Norris, Sociology and Criminal Justice Department, hungry to learn more about the central European country. She had many questions about how Czechs, who only exited a communist economy and entered a market economy about 30 years ago, might think about work today.

“A great deal of my existing research has focused on how job loss affects identity and mental health in the U.S.,” Norris notes. “So, I became curious about whether it would have the same effects in the Czech Republic, given their very different economic history and their fairly recent economic transition.”

That excitement propelled Norris to apply through the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program from the U.S. Department of State. In May, she learned her proposal was accepted and she will travel overseas during spring 2023.

Fulbrighters engage in cutting-edge research and expand their professional networks, often continuing research

collaborations started abroad and laying the groundwork for future partnerships. Upon returning, they share stories and often become active supporters of international exchange, inviting foreign scholars to campus and others to go abroad.

While her students won't directly be involved while she is overseas, Norris has already been incorporating her firsthand Czech Republic experience into some of her sociology courses. That, in turn, has sparked students to brainstorm questions Norris can ask Czechs when she interviews them during her research. Students are especially interested in Norris asking Czech students about what it's like to be a college student there.

When she returns, Norris plans to engage students and colleagues on the importance and excitement of cross-cultural learning by presenting her research at an open forum. She also plans to integrate what she learns into her courses.

“I hope to directly connect Czech and U.S. students in virtual and in-person formats,” Norris explains. “For example, I am considering leading a study abroad tour in the Czech Republic for UWL undergraduates. There is so much for students to learn about how the way society is set up influences our opportunities, choices and even our identities and mental health.”

Norris is also prepping for the Fulbright visit by studying the Czech language — something she's done for almost two years.

The Fulbright Program is the U.S. government's flagship international educational exchange program and is supported by the people of the United States and partner countries around the world. The Fulbright Program is funded through an annual appropriation made by the U.S. Congress to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

More than 800 U.S. citizens will conduct research and teach abroad for the 2022-23 academic year. Norris is the 12th UWL faculty member to earn a Fulbright scholarship since 1999.

See the others:

Additionally, Ally Hetto, '21, was recently selected for a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship. Hetto will teach English as a Second Language to students in South Africa.

See more.

Dawn Norris

Years at UWL: 9

Current courses: “Sociological Aspects of Work and Life,” “Sociology of Mental Illness,” “Generations and Age,” “Introduction to Sociology,” “Sociological Theory” and “First-Year Seminar on Freedom vs. Security.”



Celebrating a life in art

Arts building dedicated to Truman Lowe

A Ho-Chunk artist who got his start on campus will be remembered for generations to come.

On Oct. 3, UWL dedicated its Center for the Arts to the late Truman Lowe, who drew international acclaim during his five-decade career and inspired thousands of aspiring artists as a professor at UW-Madison.

The public ceremony included comments from Lowe's friends and family, a traditional Ho-Chunk blessing, and an unveiling of the new signage.

Chancellor Joe Gow says there are many things to celebrate about Lowe's life and career — particularly the way

he advanced Native American culture through his art.

"During his life, Truman Lowe fully embodied the UWL spirit — striving for excellence, honoring his culture and heritage, and leaving the world a better place than he found it," Gow says. "I hope seeing his name on the Center for the Arts will inspire future generations to learn about his legacy and work to create their own."

Lowe, who was born in Black River Falls, is the first person of color with a UWL building named in their honor.

Lowe's family members say they're grateful the man they knew is being

celebrated for his outstanding career and transformative impact on so many people.

"On a personal level, he was an incredibly empathetic person and always knew what to say to support someone at a pivotal moment in their life," says Tonia Lowe, Truman's daughter. "Professionally, he was part of a second wave of Native artists that really helped change people's perceptions of what Native art could be. This feels like recognition for all the work he did to open people's minds and pave the way for the next generation."



The campus arts building will soon be re-dedicated as the Truman Lowe Center for the Arts.

About the building

- The Truman T. Lowe Center for the Arts opened as the Fine Arts Building in the fall of 1974.
- When the building opened it housed the university art gallery, theatre and recital hall, and hosted music, art, theatre and speech communication courses.
- During the 20th anniversary celebration in 1994, the building was rededicated as the Center for the Arts.
- It currently houses the School of Visual & Performing Arts, which includes the Art, Theatre and Dance, and Music departments.



In 2005, UWL Associate Professor of English Susan Crutchfield published an article about Helen Keller's short-lived career in vaudeville. Surprisingly, Crutchfield was contacted this spring by one of the most popular radio shows in America — Radiolab, which wanted to interview her for an upcoming episode.

Research lasts:

Crutchfield shares expertise on Helen Keller with popular radio show

In 2005, Susan Crutchfield used a UWL research grant to produce and publish an article about Helen Keller's short-lived career in vaudeville.

The article generated some initial buzz, but in the 17 years since, Crutchfield assumed it had gone to rest in a quiet, mostly forgotten corner of the internet.

Then she received a call from one of the most popular radio shows in America.

"The call was totally out of the blue," says Crutchfield, an associate professor of English.

She was contacted by a writer from Radiolab, a show produced by WNYC and heard by hundreds of thousands of people each week. "I told them I would answer their questions, but since it was going back almost 20 years, I wasn't sure how useful it would be."

Crutchfield's research and clips from her interview were featured

in the show's March 11, 2022, episode, "[The Helen Keller Exorcism](#)." The show explores one deafblind woman's complex relationship with the memory of Helen Keller.

Crutchfield's expertise — which extends beyond Keller and into the broader portrayal of people with disabilities in literature, drama and film — was particularly useful during the portion of the show reflecting on Keller's time as a performer.

Most people are familiar with the story of Keller's childhood: a young girl, deaf and blind, learning to read and write with the assistance of her teacher and companion, Anne Sullivan.

Fewer know that, as older women in need of money, Keller and Sullivan performed their story in theaters across the United States and Canada — a topic examined in Crutchfield's 2005 article, "Play[ing] her part correctly': Helen Keller as a Vaudevillian Freak."

Crutchfield concludes that, because prevailing socioeconomic conditions limited career opportunities for women and people with disabilities, Keller had to abandon her political aspirations and embrace a theater circuit she may have otherwise avoided.

"One of the more important things about her adulthood is her political activism. She was very much on the side of workers' rights, unionism and even socialism," Crutchfield explains. "Vaudeville was this job that she and Anne Sullivan Macy took because they didn't have another way to make a good living. They were both getting older. Anne's health had never been great. And the lecture tours they had done in the past were too draining."

Crutchfield says she was delighted to see that her article and insights proved useful to a show with so many listeners and so much name recognition. She was impressed, she says, by the way producers wove her contributions into the fabric of the larger, more complicated story.



Helen Keller and her longtime caregiver, Anne Sullivan, developed a vaudeville routine in the 1920s to supplement their modest income.

The overall experience can offer lessons for researchers from other subject areas, Crutchfield says.

First, note-taking and documentation is vitally important. While the physical documents Crutchfield collected during her original research were long ago discarded, the notes she had saved on her computer allowed her to bridge gaps in her memory.

Second, good research is valuable, even if the payoff isn't obvious or immediate.

"I'm thrilled that it got this kind of public audience — not just scholars, but other folks who listen to the show," Crutchfield notes. "It's gratifying to know that, when I published this, it didn't just sit there with nobody reading it. The thing this really impressed upon me is that research lasts."

LaPlant, Miller, receive UW System distinction

Two CASSH faculty are among three from UWL named Wisconsin Teaching Fellows and Scholars. Kristina LaPlant, Political Science & Public Administration, and Taylor Cole Miller, Communication Studies, were selected for the distinction, reserved for those who demonstrate excellent teaching skills and a curiosity about student learning. Valerie Krage, from Educational Studies, was the other UWL fellow nominated by Provost Betsy Morgan. The year-long program began in May and culminates with a research presentation at the annual Spring Conference on Teaching and Learning in Madison.



Kristina LaPlant



Taylor Cole Miller

New program to produce next wave of school psychologists

Amy Schmidt has often thought about going back to college to become a school psychologist.

But the realities of life and the demands of teaching always got in the way.

That was until she found UW-La Crosse's new school psychology program, a fully online program allowing teachers or other professionals to pursue their license without pausing or leaving their current career.

The program launched this summer with a cohort of roughly 15 students.

"There's never a convenient time to go back to school and start a graduate program, but there were benefits to the UWL virtual psych program that I couldn't ignore," says Schmidt, a kindergarten co-teacher in the School District of Bayfield.

"I am currently eight months pregnant with my first child, so being able to continue working and take classes online was huge," she explains. "It really wouldn't have been possible for me to pursue a degree anytime soon, unless it was fully virtual."

Rob Dixon, director of the UWL school psychology program, says the new offering has three main benefits.

First, it addresses Wisconsin's shortage of school psychologists working to meet students' academic, behavioral and mental health needs.

"This extends UWL's reach to provide knowledge and skills for educators who can then make a difference in a child's life."

Second, it helps rural school districts that have a particularly difficult time hiring and retaining school psychologists.

Third, it promotes greater diversity among school psychologists in the state.

"There are many educators who want to become school psychologists but can't leave their communities and

jobs to attend a face-to-face program," Dixon explains. "This extends UWL's reach to provide knowledge and skills for educators who can then make a difference in a child's life."

In early July, the inaugural cohort met at UWL for orientation and team-building exercises — a valuable chance to meet face to face before diving into the online, four-year program.

The students got acquainted through games and icebreakers before heading inside to discuss the nuts and bolts of the program.

They came from all over the state — Mineral Point, Augusta, Bayfield, Menominee County — but had the same motivation: helping children in their school district.

"A lot of the kids in our district have experienced trauma in their background," notes Eliza Koeller, an elementary special education teacher in the Menominee Indian School District, where 99% of students are Native American.



Associate Professor Rob Dixon discusses the details of the program during orientation. The program is unique due to its online format, which allows educators to continue working while pursuing their degree.



Students in UWL's online school psychology program played icebreaker games as part of their orientation into the program.

In Koeller's 14 years with the district, it has cycled through six school psychologists. Upon earning her certification, she hopes to bring much-needed stability.

"I know our kids, I know our families, and I know there's a need for this in our district," she says. "I'm excited to continue working with our kids, even if it's not in a teaching role."

Adds Dalton Miles, an English/language arts teacher in the Mineral Point Unified School District: "The biggest draw, for me, is to make sure

every student has the tools to be successful in the classroom."

The need for school psychologists will only grow, experts say, as educators place increasing emphasis on mental health and trauma-informed care.

"There have been so many recent events that have shown the need for more mental health professionals, and school psychology checks a lot of boxes for me personally," Schmidt says. "I get to continue working with students, it requires lots of

collaboration and the challenge of putting together puzzles, and I get to help students, families and staff in a new way."

There's a unique, personal layer to Schmidt's pursuit of a school psychology license.

When Schmidt was a child, her school psychologist was Doug Jardine. The pair now work together in Bayfield — Schmidt at the start of her career, Jardine at the end of his.

Continued on next page

Jardine plans to delay his retirement for the next few years, buying Schmidt enough time to finish the program. “We discussed what it would mean as far as his role, and he graciously offered to continue in his current capacity so that he could be my supervisor throughout and would fully retire when my program was finished,” Schmidt says.

“I couldn’t be more appreciative of his support and encouragement.”

Following in his footsteps, she adds, “is a whole new challenge I can’t wait to take on.”

About UWL Graduate & Extended Learning

Graduate & Extended Learning connects the university to the community by offering innovative educational opportunities including degree programs, professional development, youth programs, conference and event services, and test preparation.



The Rosandich Graduate Thesis and Dissertation Award

...recognizes the best graduate thesis, based on originality, impact and writing quality. The award, funded by Thomas P. Rosandich, '54, founding president of the U.S. Sports Academy in Daphne, Alabama, are awarded each May. One recipient in 2022 was from CASSH.

Mai Chao Duddeck graduated with a Doctorate in Education in Student Affairs Administration and Leadership in May 2021. Mai Chao’s dissertation, “Redefining Hmong American Woman Identity in Higher Education: A Scholarly Personal Narrative,” is significant for two reasons. It is one of the few qualitative research studies that focuses on the Hmong American educational experience.

Her study is likely the first higher education/student affairs dissertation grounded in Hmong cultural knowledge and epistemology, merging a specific form of narrative methodology (scholarly personal narrative) with a conceptual framework she created from the tradition of the Hmong Story Cloth.

Mai Chao holds three degrees from UWL. Along with the doctorate, she earned a Bachelor of Science in art education in 2006 and a Master of Education-Professional Development in 2008. She currently works with Gundersen Health System in La Crosse.

The other recipient of the award was Shayla (Michel) Victoria, who earned a Master of Science in Biology in May 2021.



SOCIAL JUSTICE WEEK

Speakers addressed a variety of issues during the 5th annual Social Justice Week April 4-7. “Spaces, Places and People: The Urgency of Intersectional Environmentalism, Unified Communities and Mutual Networks” featured presentations, panel sessions and keynote addresses focusing on social justice research, teaching and advocacy.



Associate Professor Adam Driscoll, Sociology & Criminal Justice Department, speaks on “Ethics and Environmental Conflict.”



Professor Emeritus Al Gedicks speaks on “Defending Water, Defending Life.”



UWL students present information about the university's Campus Thread project, which promotes sustainable fashion to students. They also shared the impact the fashion industry has on the environment worldwide.



Students take part in Social Justice Week's networking social.

CASSH RECOGNITION

The John E. Magerus Award for the Outstanding Graduating Senior from the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

An archaeology major who graduated in May received CASSH's top award for students.



Signe Aspengren
Bachelor of Science, majoring
in archaeology and minoring in
French and biology

Signe Aspengren graduated with a Bachelor of Science, majoring in archaeology and minoring in French and biology. She was on the Dean's List each semester and earned a 3.97 GPA.

Aspengren earned an Eagle Apprenticeship when coming to campus, and went on to receive the Soaring Eagle Scholarship, Oren E. Frazee Community Scholarship, the iEngage Study Abroad Scholarship and the Archaeology Scholarship. She was a research assistant with the Archaeology Department throughout college.

Aspengren participated in numerous campus internships, and was a teaching assistant for anthropology and archaeology classes. She volunteered as a French conversation partner, as well as with Archaeology Department activities. Aspengren plans to work in the cultural resource management industry before pursuing a doctorate in bioarchaeology.

She is from New Richmond, Wisconsin.

CASSH faculty among teaching excellence

Three CASSH faculty are among six on campus recognized for making a difference in students' lives in and out of the classroom. A university committee selected six faculty to receive 2022 Eagle Teaching Excellence Awards. Here's a summary of the three.



Ronda Leahy
Communication Studies
Started at UWL: 1996

Courses: I teach in the organizational and professional communication area. I teach our General Education course, a professional communication course, an Interviewing course and the capstone course in communication studies.

Background: UWL was my first teaching position after graduate school. Putting myself through college, I had several part-time jobs. The most interesting job was working in food stands at carnivals. In other words, I was a "carny!"

Favorite part of teaching: I love creating and maintaining relationships with my students. Interacting with students is my favorite part of my job. My goal is to create a classroom culture of mutual respect. I believe we learn from one another. I try to get to know my students individually so that I can tailor assignments to help them in their future endeavors. I enjoy seeing my students learn and flourish. I love hearing from students about how I helped them in their successes beyond my classroom.



Lisa Lenarz

Art/Art Education

Started at UWL: 2012 (returned in 2018)

Courses: I teach art and art education-related courses.

Background: Prior to my current position, I taught as:

- Adjunct Instructor at Viterbo University from 2014-2018
- Adjunct Instructor at UWL from 2012-2014 & spring of 2018
- K-12 (traveling) Art Teacher at the School District of La Crosse (2008-2018)

Favorite part of teaching: My favorite part of teaching is connecting and collaborating with students. I enjoy being part of students' personal and academic growth as they explore creativity, expression and culture within the content. It's gratifying to witness students' shift from developing sincere appreciation for the visual arts to advocating for societal change through the pedagogy and practices of art education.



Jason Sumontha

Psychology

Started at UWL: 2019

Courses: I'm an assistant professor in the Psychology Department, where I teach topics related to culture, families and ecological systems.

Background: Before coming to UWL, I was a graduate student at the University of Virginia (UVA), where I received my Ph.D. in community and developmental psychology.

Favorite part of teaching: I love when students see their culture, identity, experiences, family or friends in what we learn. To me, learning should be an adventure. I want students to

remember a time when everything was new and learning was a grand quest — of dinosaurs, starry skies, metamorphosis and volcanoes. And to find that the learning (and adventure) brought them right back home. Back to where they started. Back to their community. Back to themselves. And they see all they knew before through new eyes and an older heart. That is the magic and adventure of learning!

Other faculty, staff honored

The 2022 CASSH Faculty and Staff Recognition of Excellence Awards were presented at the "Recognition of Excellence" April 26. Recipients included:

Faculty Award for Research/Scholarship/Creative Endeavors

Hongying Xu, Global Cultures & Languages

Faculty Award for Service

Jason Sumontha, Psychology

Faculty Award for Teaching

Zachary Stensen, Art
Kevin Zabel, Psychology

Community Engagement Award

Alysa Remsburg, Environmental Studies

Academic Staff Award for Teaching

Joshua Doster, Art

Academic Staff Award for Service

Jessica Peterson, Communication Studies

Inclusive Excellence

Ashley Edwards, Communication Studies

University Staff Award

Krista Shulka, Theatre



HEAR, HERE IN EUROPE

The History Department's Hear, Here project has jumped across the pond — engaging communities in one of Europe's smallest countries.

Thomas Cauvin, associate professor of public history at the University of Luxembourg, wanted to bring Hear, Here to the city of Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg, after learning of the unique way to communicate history through multiple narratives, including voices normally overlooked.

The city launched the project in April as one of five, grant-funded public history outreach activities to create multiple ways to engage the community in history. The project is named "HistorEsch," the Luxembourgish word for "historically."

Luxembourg is the second international location to develop a Hear, Here project, after London, Ontario, Canada. The basis of the original project, developed by UWL History Professor Ariel Beaujot and her students in 2015, is that everyday people with different perspectives share in the telling of local history.

Above, A blast furnace is the first stop in HistorEsch. The furnace at Belval (industry terrain) at Esch-sur-Alzette, built in the late 1970s, and others have become a symbol for the Luxembourg steel industry. At the site, a former worker explains seeing the furnace and becoming nauseous. Today, a pond surrounds the ruins of blast furnace C at Belval. The Belval industrial terrain has been transformed into a university campus. — Photo by Joëlla van Donkersgoed, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Luxembourg.

 Recordings and translations from HistorEsch

 Learn more about Hear, Here in La Crosse



The UWL History Department Hear, Here project is now in Esch-Sur-Alzette, Luxembourg.



The Eagle Battalion receives a ribbon in recognition of the 2021 MacArthur Award in April. The award is given annually to the best ROTC battalion in the Midwest's Third Brigade, which comprises 42 military science programs in 10 states.

Eagle Battalion is best in region

A decade ago, UWL's ROTC Eagle Battalion was in danger of ending. In April, it was recognized as the best ROTC battalion in the Midwest's Third Brigade — comprising 42 military science programs in Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

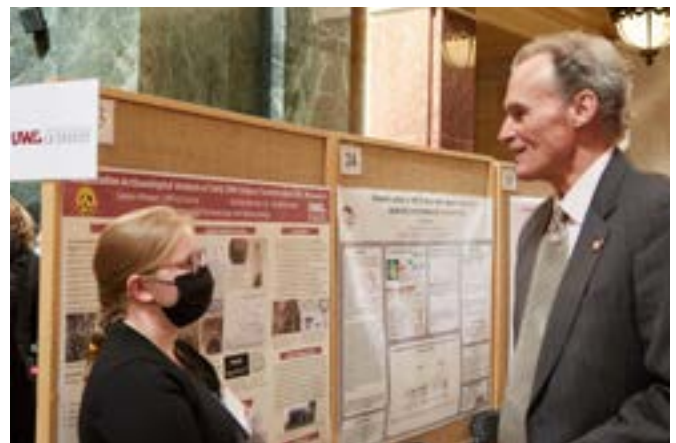
“This is a huge day for our program. This will be long remembered as the year we won the MacArthur Award,” said Lt. Col. Erik Archer, chair of UWL's Military Science Department. “I'm OK foot-stomping that and being proud of that, because it was earned. It's not a short-term thing. The power and the potency of this award is that it was earned through the long game. This award is for our cadets, because they've done incredible things.”

Archer attributes the Eagle Battalion's success to its 70-plus cadets, who have strong GPAs and physical training scores, and consistently make time for competitive summer training and community service.

He also credits department faculty for molding and inspiring the cadets, and university leadership for its continued support of the program.

Research in the Rotunda

UWL students joined dozens of undergraduates from all UW campuses in March to display and discuss their research findings at the state capitol during Research in the Rotunda. Professor Nicholas Bakken, Sociology & Criminal Justice, started spearheading campus undergraduate research projects this fall in his new role as UWL Student Research and Experiential Learning Coordinator.



Lauren Brewer, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, Archaeology and Anthropology Department, talks with UWL Chancellor Joe Gow. Her project, “Collaborative Archaeological Analysis of Early 20th Century Tourism in Red Cliff, Wisconsin,” investigates the roles of the local Indigenous community in early tourism and its overall impact on the history of Red Cliff, which is of interest to modern tribal members.



Kassidy Leannais of Franklin, Wisconsin, Sociology Department, discusses her project with Wisconsin State Sen. Brad Pfaff. Her study, “How Political Efficacy Impacts Support for Redistributive Policies,” aims to find the potential correlation between political efficacy and support for government intervention of wealth inequality.

RENOWNED HYPNOTIST CHRIS JONES GOT HIS START ON CAMPUS

Chris Jones remembers one of his first times performing in front of an audience.

It was the mid-2000s, and he was representing the now-defunct Baird Hall in the Mr. UW-La Crosse competition.

His mind-reading trick failed. His card trick flopped. Then it was time for his final act: levitation.

“I tried to levitate a woman’s driver’s license, and I did,” Jones, ’08, recalls. “Unfortunately, with the spotlight, everyone could see the shadow of the string.”

From inauspicious beginnings, Jones applied himself and slowly but surely learned to captivate an audience. Today, he is a world-renowned hypnotist and comedian, who had his big break hypnotizing Howie Mandel during a 2015 episode of NBC’s “America’s Got Talent.”



Chris Jones, an '08 sociology major, has become a nationally known hypnotist.

“Life is fascinating to me,” says Jones, reflecting on his rise from failed magician to rising star. He even had his own prank show, “Double Take,” on Facebook Watch.

“With hypnosis, you can’t really practice,” he explains. “You can try practicing with a friend, but you’re always going to wonder: ‘Did I really hypnotize you? Or were you just pretending?’ The only way to get better is to go out and do it.”

Over the past decade, Jones has done exactly that, reaching a level of success many up-and-coming entertainers only dream about.

All that time on the road has afforded Jones the luxury of spending more time with his family, while doing fewer shows and focusing on bigger projects. It has also allowed him to give back — in the form of a \$10,000 donation to the UWL Foundation, which will be used to create a scholarship program for underrepresented students.

The scholarship honors Ron Rochon, a former faculty member who mentored Jones during his time at UWL and went on to become president of the University of Southern Indiana.

Jones, who holds a bachelor’s degree in sociology, didn’t set out to be a hypnotist.

As a member of the UWL men’s cross-country team, he had dreams of



Jones studying a book on magic in Murphy Library.

following in the footsteps of Andrew Rock, ’04, and competing in the Olympics.

Jones had always been interested in skillful deception. In college, rather than studying, he would go to Murphy Library to read books about magic. As a resident assistant, he used card tricks to connect with his peers.

But it wasn’t until hypnotist Fred Winters performed at Cartwright Center that he saw a career path emerge.

“I chased him to his car after the show, and he told me what books to read if I wanted to get good at hypnotism,” Jones remembers. Winters’ performance, paired with the disastrous Mr. UWL competition, “encouraged me to stop doing magic and move toward hypnosis.”

After earning his degree, Jones polished his craft by doing shows all over the United States, night after night after night.

After his NBC appearance and other successful performances, Jones was

able to raise his rates. He was invited to perform at bigger venues and overseas.

And he was offered his own show on Facebook Watch, in which he demonstrated the power of hypnotism by working with celebrities such as John Cena, Pamela Anderson and Gabriel Iglesias.

Of course, Jones is aware of the skepticism of hypnotism.

There’s a scientific explanation, he says, that has nothing to do with magic. And it is supported by numerous studies, including a 2016 study by Stanford University.

When a person is hypnotized, researchers say, parts of their brain experience altered activity and connectivity. This affects their ability to perceive what is happening around them. Sometimes, a disconnect will even form between the brain and the body, making them highly suggestible to instructions or commands.

“I don’t mind if people are skeptical. In fact, I encourage it,” Jones says. “Our opinions are our opinions, and they can change. I love when, after a show, someone says they started off skeptical, but now they see that it’s real.”

As his career has progressed, Jones has used his platform not just to share his passion for hypnotism, but to be a positive role model.



Largest donation

Gift impacts English Department and Murphy Library

The largest gift in UWL history was announced at the beginning of the spring semester.

“Sometimes, we know a gift is coming, and we have people working on it and shaping it,” explained Chancellor Joe Gow. “Other times, there may be people who give you a gift, but you don’t really know it’s coming.”

The \$2.2 million estate gift from Bill and Yvonne Hyde falls squarely in the second category.

Bill taught in the English Department from 1956 to 1992, while Yvonne worked in Murphy Library, mostly in cataloging, from 1957 to 1995.

After Bill’s death in January 2015 and Yvonne’s death in April 2021, the couple left much of their estate to the UWL Foundation, setting aside \$1.1 million for the English Department and \$1.1 million for Murphy Library.

UWL’s second large gift announced in January was The Paul Fleckenstein Trust, led by trustees Jay and Carolyn Scott, who gave the La Crosse Community Foundation nearly \$500,000 to construct a research vessel for UWL’s River Studies Center.

“People like the Hydes and Jay and Carolyn Scott are powerful reminders that we are a UWL family,” Gow said. “They appreciate what we’re trying to do and how good we

are, and they want to support it and keep it going for a long, long time.”

It’s still being determined how the Hyde estate gift will be used. Staff, faculty and administrators say the infusion of funding will have profound effects in the classroom and beyond.

Karl Kunkel, CASSH dean, called it a “truly transformational gift that will take the very good work happening in our English Department to the next level of excellence.”

Said English Chair Kate Parker: “We were absolutely amazed to receive this extraordinary gift — a testament to the Hydes’ generosity and their long-standing commitment to the value of a liberal arts education. Their gift will immeasurably impact the department and inspire faculty and students and the communities we serve for years to come.”

John Jax, Murphy Library director, said the donation will create learning opportunities far beyond what the library’s strained budget could usually provide.

The Hydes were longtime supporters of UWL, and of the English Department and Murphy Library in particular. Over the years, they gave many thousands of dollars toward student scholarships, educational programming, the cost of guest speakers and learning materials, and more.



Abby Kuna with former Governor Tommy Thompson

Abby Kuna earns statewide award

A psychology major is among the 13 students from each campus in the UW system to earn a Tommy G. Thompson Leadership Scholarship.

Abby Kuna, a junior from Brookfield, has been awarded \$2,300 as the UWL recipient of the prestigious honor.

Scholarship recipients were awarded for exemplifying Thompson's spirit of tackling big problems through teamwork and determination to make Wisconsin a better place. They display dedication, inventiveness and leadership, and are expected to impact their communities.

Kuna knew she wanted to pursue a degree in psychology and work with older adults after being influenced by her grandmother, who attended many of Kuna's events during her K-12 education.

"Because I was around my grandma so much growing up, I believe that it led me to become interested in older adults," Kuna says. "I want to pursue a career in geriatrics because it is important to me, and I enjoy spending time with older adults."

She says since coming to college, she has become more independent and open minded, as well as better in addressing conflict. Kuna attributes much of that growth to serving as a resident assistant, where she has learned patience and understanding while helping roommates experiencing conflict.

"I help people communicate with their roommates in a respectful and productive way," she explains. "This can help me in my future career when I work with older adults such as those who have dementia. I can communicate with them in a positive way and be more open minded about their situation."

Kuna expects to take what she has learned about leadership from her job as a resident assistant and as president of the Gerontology Club into her career.

"It is important to assess the needs of others when being a leader," she notes. "I focus on my residents and take into consideration their needs and wants when making decisions."



Students find working on “Steam Ticket” valuable for a variety of reasons. Editors for the spring 2022 issue included, from left, Madison Vaillant, Alexia Walz and Noah Gassman.

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Literary journal still going strong after a quarter century

Even a pandemic couldn’t end the printing of a student literary journal. “Steam Ticket” is full steam ahead as it reaches 25 years — with students adamant on seeing the printed periodical continue.

“Every year, I ask students if they’d rather go online exclusively, and every year they say, ‘no,’” says English Professor Matt Cashion. “They like the physical artifact of the book, and I imagine they like to take it away as a souvenir of the work they’ve put in.”

Cashion, the journal’s faculty advisor since 2006, says some featured selections are made available online, but students prefer the printed editions.

The fact that the journal remains popular after 25 years is noteworthy, Cashion says. Many printed journals have become extinct or endangered due to the internet and growing printing costs.

“Our longevity is, in part, a testament to the writers who keep writing stories and poems that deserve to be shared

with readers who continue to be sustained by courageous witnesses and wild imaginations,” he explains.

Students in the English Department’s annual spring “English 320—Literary Journal Production” course continue to make the publication happen. The annual journal attracts submissions from national and international writers and artists, as well as students. The current issue includes writers from six countries and 22 states, including U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo and a Ukrainian poet.

Cashion says the department’s growing creative writing minor is key to Steam Ticket’s success. The minor, he notes, creates personal, professional and civic ways for students to apply their writing skills.

Alexia Walz, a senior from La Crosse majoring in media studies, says serving as the periodical’s editor gave her hands-on experience of the publication process and improved her writing.

“I learned quite a bit about the publishing industry, including how it works and the kind of stories and poems that get published,” Walz explains. “I also learned about teamwork and the importance of communicating with the people around you. All of this indirectly helped me become a better writer.”

Madison Vaillant, a junior from Lakeville, Minnesota, was prose editor for spring 2022. She acquired many applicable life skills in her role leading discussion with students in selecting content.

“I gained a lot of insight into how to direct a group, but also how to trust them to thoroughly critique pieces and make decisions on their own,” she explains. “I got better about managing group discussion by asking thought-provoking questions and making sure everyone’s voices were heard.”



English Professor Matt Cashion has served as “Steam Ticket’s” faculty advisor since 2006. Cashion says the journal remains popular after 25 years. “Our longevity is, in part, a testament to the writers who keep writing stories and poems that deserve to be shared with readers who continue to be sustained by courageous witnesses and wild imaginations,” he explains.

Noah Gassman, a junior from St. Peter, Minnesota, says before taking the class, he was considering internship responsibilities at publishing companies. All those internships focused on collaboration, time management, editing and reading through submissions.

“I did all of this with this course,” notes Gassman, the poetry editor. “So far, I’ve only taken lecture or discussion-based courses, but to take a practical course where we organize and create a tangible product, where we put our studies into practice, was an extremely valuable experience for me.”

Many creative writing minor graduates eventually work in publishing, public relations, or journalism. The minor also complements a wide range of majors, from communications and marketing to theatre and psychology.

Yia Vang used to wash dishes and count the days until he would never again have to work in a restaurant.

Then he had an epiphany.

“I always looked at working in restaurants as a job I did, living paycheck to paycheck,” Vang, a ’10 graduate in communication studies, explains. “One day, I had this ‘aha’ moment where I realized that food isn’t just sustenance. It’s a universal language we can use to speak to one another. You can tell a story through the food you make.”

A decade later, Vang is one of the most celebrated chefs in the Midwest, known for his highly successful Union Hmong Kitchen in Minneapolis. The window-service-style restaurant blends two of Vang’s favorite things — Hmong food and storytelling — and has helped him become a rising star.

Early this summer, Vang and fellow Twin Cities chefs Mike Yuen and Marshall Paulsen were featured in the premiere episode of Netflix’s reboot of “Iron Chef.” On the show, guest chefs such as Vang square off against resident Iron Chefs in a timed cooking competition based around a secret ingredient.

It was a pinch-me moment for Vang, who was born in a Thai refugee camp, attended school in rural Wood County, Wisconsin, and grew up watching the iconic cooking show.

“When I walked into the Kitchen Stadium and saw the whole operation, I felt like a kid again,” Vang says. “Then when I saw the Iron Chef we had to battle against, when they revealed who it was, I freaked out. It was such an honor to be there.”

Even when the cameras were off, it was surreal.

“It was my first time flying first class, and I was like, ‘OK, act like you’ve been here before,’” he says. “And then when you get there, they put you in a green room with a personal assistant. At one point, I asked for some gum, and he came back with five different types. It was just incredible.”

While it was a thrill being treated like a star, that’s not why Vang loves to cook. His motivations are much more genuine and heartfelt.

Cooking is how Vang connects with his Hmong heritage and shares it with the world, one plate at a time. It’s also a

chance for him to use the lessons he learned as a communication studies student.

“In Hmong culture, our DNA is intricately woven into what we eat. It tells the story of where we’ve been, where we are and where we’re going,” Vang notes. “As a communications student, I learned a lot about how to communicate that and how to get people to interpret your message. Those are definitely skills I use as a restaurateur.”

Vang says he owes a debt of gratitude to Hmong chefs who, after immigrating to the U.S. in the 1970s, became industry trailblazers.

He is also grateful to his parents, who passed down qualities like creativity and resourcefulness in the kitchen, both hallmarks of Hmong cooking.

Building upon the success of Union Hmong Kitchen, Vang plans to open a sit-down-style restaurant in Minneapolis. It will be called Vinai, named for the Thai refugee camp where Vang and his family lived before coming to the U.S.

“The restaurant is really a love letter to my parents and where we’ve been as a family,” he says. “It’s going to encompass what Hmong food is all about.”

Yia Vang, ’10, owner of Union Hmong Kitchen in Minneapolis, has established himself as one of the most celebrated chefs in the Midwest. Photo credit: Lauren Cutshall

FROM DISHWASHER TO ‘IRON CHEF’



Shuma Iwai teaches in the Race, Gender and Sexuality Studies program. The program takes an intersectional approach – combining insights of scholars in different fields regarding inequalities related to race, gender and sexuality and class.



Learning and living social justice

New Race, Gender and Sexuality Studies Department courses reflect on society's 'hidden histories,' how students can bring about change

Today's youngest generations are advocating for change. They want action to address issues plaguing society for centuries, from racial inequality to the oppression of women.

A new UWL department provides foundational knowledge for social justice work like this. The new Race, Gender and Sexuality Studies Department (RGSS) merges two departments: Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Ethnic & Racial Studies.

Course offerings have been blended and updated to give students an interdisciplinary view of social justice issues. Students will begin to understand the enormous diversity of the U.S. and a globalizing world, and the structures of inequality on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, and social class that shape it.

"We are focused on empowering students to think critically about the systems that shape their lives and providing them with tools to address inequalities," says Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, RGSS chair.

Sometimes just a few classes can inspire students to join a justice movement. UWL

senior Olivia Paulson, a psychology and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies major, learned about gender-based human rights violations from 20th century Ireland in her History of Motherhood class. She later received an undergraduate research and creativity grant to study reproductive justice issues in the country.

"People I spoke with encouraged me in my research process to continue to bring light to the truth, uplift survivor testimonies, and fight for justice," she says. "I learned research is essential to social transformation as it has the potential to uncover information, reach new conclusions, and inform future activist efforts."

Students will understand how social transformation is possible by finding opportunities to join in. The program helps students understand how skills transfer to career opportunities, and it builds on the work of generations of UWL people dating back to when the Ethnic and Racial Studies Department and Women's Studies Department were founded in the 1960s and 70s, says Vandenberg-Daves.

RGSS programs

- Race, Gender and Sexuality Studies major and minor
- Social justice minor
- Hmong American Studies Certificate Program
- The Self Sufficiency Program a free, pre-college program to explore college



UWL senior Olivia Paulson, left, a psychology and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies major, pictured with Professor Jodi Vandenberg-Daves. Paulson conducted research on gender-based human rights violations in Ireland while studying abroad there.



SNAP

MURPHY MASTERPIECES

Art students held a procession across campus from the Truman Lowe Center for the Arts to Murphy Library with their art in May. They participated in an initiative of Murphy Library staff Amber Leibundgut-Peterson and Marc Manke, both eager to promote the work of student artists and create a more vibrant, creative learning environment. The artwork, installed throughout the building for at least two years, ranges stylistically from subtle, abstract color field paintings to mandala-like forms and figurative work.

 [Discover more.](#)

