

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-LA CROSSE | SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

EAGLEEDGE

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FINDING HIS 'VOICE'

Alum's appearance on hit singing show highlights stories of success, perseverance



Teachers share their experience amid COVID-19

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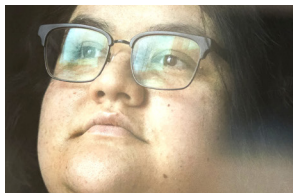
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Marcie Wycoff-Horn, Ph.D.

to experience disparities due to systemic racism, including a lack of access to healthcare, education, and technology. There is no question, much work lies ahead of us. The School of Education is committed to action — learning and unlearning — so we can prepare future teachers, specialists, and administrators who will help rebound and rebuild for equity and justice.

We have learned many lessons that we will hold with us as we support future educators in the years to come. We've stayed grounded in the mission of preparing graduates who enter the profession with a whole child perspective, a growth mindset, a will to be vulnerable, as well as a reflective approach to teaching and learning for equity and justice. Innovative practices and partnerships grounded in a shared purpose continue to be central to educator preparation at UWL. Part of our commitment to staying on the cutting edge was an early investment in integrating technology into the curriculum. As a result, education majors have been equipped with an iPad upon admission into the School of Education, and have worked with various online supports throughout their preparation program. This allowed our students to quickly adapt and support their cooperating teachers and learners through multiple pivots between remote and hybrid learning. Many faculty members had also been using a video-based assessment system for coaching and feedback over the past several years. When local schools asked us to supervise field and student teachers remotely, we were able to do so while continuing to provide robust feedback to our students. Another support that focused on student learning environments was the incorporation

It was this time last year when UWL shifted to conducting classes remotely. Over the past 12 months, we have experienced tremendous losses, significant challenges, as well as remarkable achievements and innovations. We have seen how racial injustice and systemic inequity worsened the hardship caused by COVID-19. This period has been called the twin pandemics, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) continue

of TeachLivE into field and student teaching experiences. TeachLivE is a mixed reality classroom simulation platform that is leading the way in the U.S. by providing innovative opportunities for teachers. We are excited to explore the longer-term use of this tool.

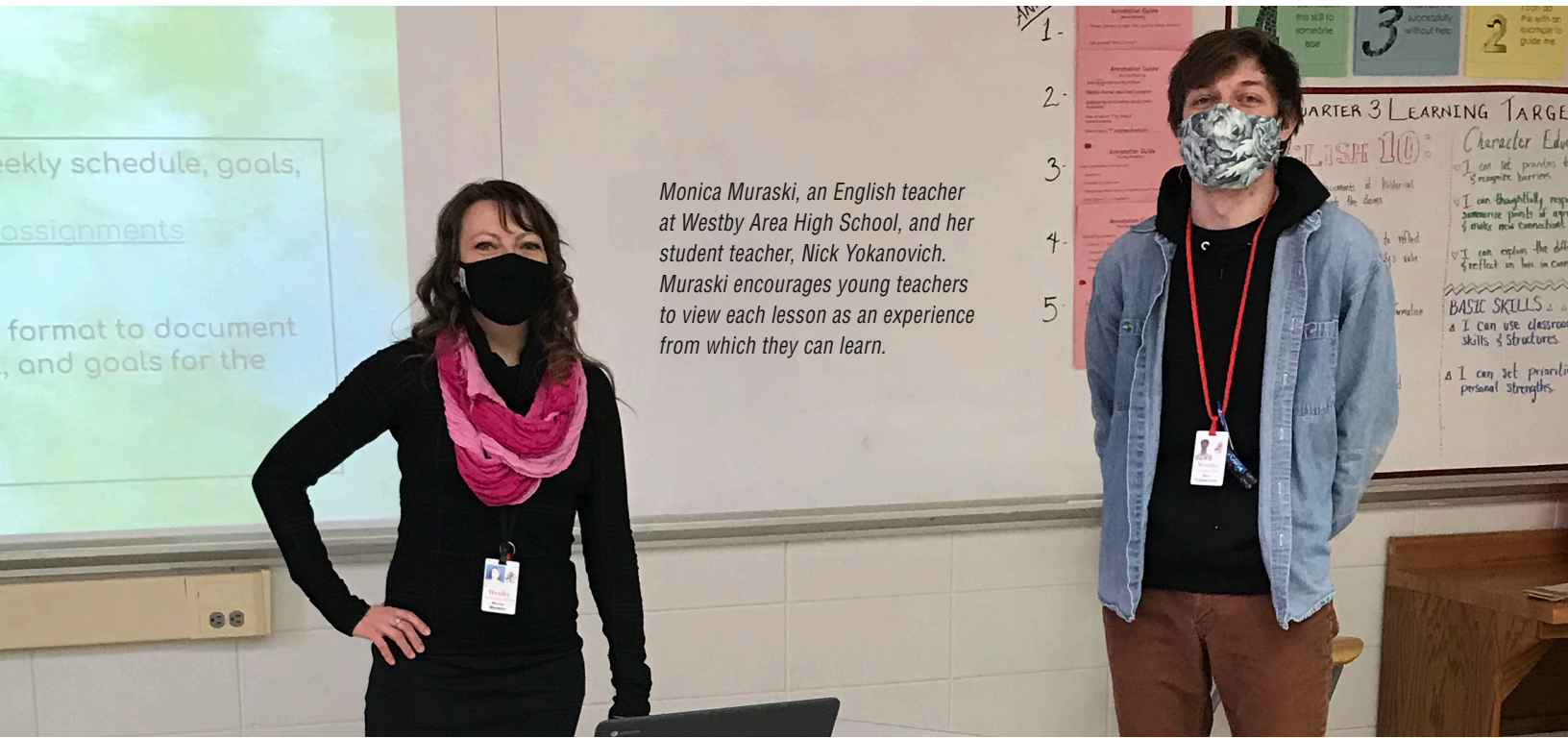
The work we do is reliant upon strategic partnerships with our local schools. Without them, carrying out our mission would be nearly impossible. We continue to communicate with mentor cooperating teachers and administrators about how to keep educator preparation moving forward, while prioritizing health and safety. Our partners have continued to commit to educator preparation throughout the pandemic, hosting nearly as many education majors in their remote, hybrid, and in-person classrooms as during pre-pandemic times, and paying it forward to the profession. In the end, routines, relationships, and attending to unique learner needs remain central to success.

This newsletter shares perspectives from future and practicing educators who have demonstrated courage, determination, and kindness during the pandemic. You will also learn about resources faculty and staff are sharing with education majors and the greater La Crosse community. Current and former UWL Eagles' stories highlight their ability to persevere during difficult times. They have held onto their dreams and let their voices be heard through donating culturally responsive books, earning a spot on "The Voice," participating in a national poetry competition, and even earning a nomination to serve in the Biden Administration.

I can't thank the faculty, staff, students, and school partners enough for their efforts. The pandemic has been hard, physically and mentally, but we will get through it together. I am deeply grateful for the School of Education community. I am optimistic, but will also be vigilant in the coming months. Continue to stay safe and be kind to one another.

In Partnership,

Marcie Wycoff-Horn, Dean



Monica Muraski, an English teacher at Westby Area High School, and her student teacher, Nick Yokanovich. Muraski encourages young teachers to view each lesson as an experience from which they can learn.

TEACHERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE AMID COVID-19

In our summer 2020 issue, the Eagle Edge highlighted student teachers who had to grow, adapt, and embrace virtual instruction during COVID-19. For our winter issue, we caught up with two cooperating teachers and a recent grad to see what challenges and opportunities have arisen this school year.

The interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

**Monica Muraski, English,
Westby Area High School**

Q: What has the delivery modality been for you this semester (virtual, hybrid, in-person)?

A: The Westby Area School District has literally tried it all! We have had in-person and virtual attendance

five days a week. In October, we transitioned to hybrid and fully virtual attendance. In December, we pivoted again to full virtual instruction for most learners in the district. And then in January, we moved back to a hybrid-virtual combination model of attendance for the high school.

Q: How did you feel on day one of virtual teaching during the pandemic?

A: I honestly thought we would be out of class for a week or two, and I anticipated returning to school without many changes. I had been following news about the virus since January 2020, but I had no idea of the impact it would have on society. I tried to extend a lot of grace to students and families while still maintaining the

integrity of the education we were offering. We continued to grade through this time, so I constantly weighed how much I could hold students accountable for their learning. I learned quickly in a “trial by fire” attempt to continuously adjust my practices to be more effective in reaching more students and families.

Q: What surprised/challenged you the most?

A: Teaching during the pandemic last spring, my biggest challenge was creating the routine and structures when our district used asynchronous instruction. Ultimately it reinforced how much we all thrive when we follow a routine — from my 4-year-old son, all the way up to the top administrators in our district.

Q: What made the partnership between you and the student teacher successful?

A: I am really grateful to have the opportunity to work with new teachers, and when I am in the mentorship role, I try to get to know what strengths we can utilize right from day one in our partnership. Then we build into practicing areas that are not as comfortable or familiar. Every teacher that I've worked with has been different, and they have all taught me incredible things.

Q: What, if anything, would you have done differently?

A: I wish that we had more time with all students in the classroom together. There is a different energy when we have small classes or have an online lesson that we're going through together. Specifically, I wish

we had more opportunities to work on how to teach and manage student behavior, because those are valuable lessons that I had to pick up over the years.

Q: What advice would you offer to a teacher candidate who is student teaching now?

A: Approach each lesson as an experiment. At the end, you can look at the “data” and adjust accordingly without taking it personally. You will fail. Lessons will flop. Kids will challenge you. View these experiences as “data” to inform your next experiment (lesson). This is the hardest thing to do but allowing yourself grace is what will allow you to bring your best self to the classroom each day.



Cathy Burge

Cathy Burge, third grade, Coulee Region Virtual Academy, CRVA
(formerly fifth grade at Viking Elementary in Holmen)

Q: What has the delivery modality been for you this semester (virtual, hybrid, in-person)?

A: I have taught face to face for 34 years. I was offered a third grade position in the Coulee Region Virtual

Academy (a full-time, online experience for K-12 students in La Crosse County). I figured as long as everything was going to be so different, I would take a leap with CRVA.

Q: How did you feel on day one of virtual teaching during the pandemic?

A: Virtual learning was so foreign to me. I had so much to learn with the technology. It was nice to have the CRVA curriculum in place.

Q: What surprised/challenged you the most?

A: I thought it would be difficult to develop professional relationships with the students and a classroom community. However, we have accomplished both of these goals. I have not changed my belief that teaching is all about the learning and helping each student build upon their strengths. I really like the fact that I get so much one-to-one time with my students. I am able to meet them where they are at and help them learn individually.

Q: What made the partnership between you and the student teacher successful?

A: The relationship I had with my student teacher, Haley Mead, and field student, Greta Dokken, provided us the opportunity to collaborate and share ideas. The three of us were

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starting on a new journey. We were all on equal footing and mentored each other. We figured out how to best make this new platform work for the children and the families in our charge.

Q: What, if anything, would you have done differently?

A: I like the fact that the curriculum is set. This gave us the opportunity to focus on individual student learning. The curriculum and all of our teaching is transparent. We are working with students and families to educate children in a closer partnership than we ever have before.

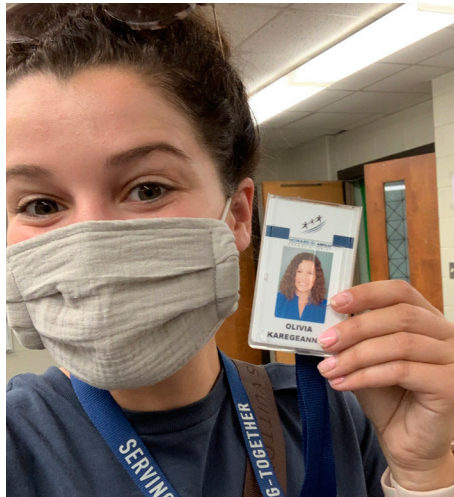
Q: What advice would you offer to a teacher candidate who is student teaching now?

A: As in face to face, you need to develop a trusting relationship with your students. They need to know that you are there for them to support their learning. This relationship needs to be first and foremost no matter what the platform.

Olivia Karregeannes, Math, Bay View Middle School in Howard, Wisconsin

Q: What has the delivery modality been for you this semester (virtual, hybrid, in-person)?

A: My school started off with the hybrid model in September. We switched to all virtual in October. In January, we switched back to our hybrid model.



Olivia Karregeannes

Q: How did you feel on day one of virtual teaching during the pandemic?

A: I felt anxious but also an overwhelming sense of contentment that I finally made it where I wanted to be. Since switching my major to teaching my sophomore year, it has been my dream to be a teacher. I wasn't anxious because I felt unprepared, but because of the change and starting the next step of my life. I will never forget my first class that I taught that day.

Q: What surprised/challenged you the most?

A: The most challenging part of this year was the combination of uncertainty with teaching and not knowing how I would be teaching day to day with trying to find innovative and exciting ways to teach math through a laptop.

Q: What helped you prepare for your first job as a teacher?

A: My student teaching experience. Student teaching was the most

challenging, eye-opening, and exciting time in my whole college career. It was where I not only had to use everything I have learned, but also reflect on every lesson to make sure I was meeting all of my students' needs. Kim Novak at Lincoln Middle School is the biggest reason why I have succeeded in my first year of teaching. She taught me to assess after every lesson to make sure students were improving, to meet students where they are, and to know how to address students' needs. Ultimately, she taught me how to be the best teacher I can be.

Q: What, if anything, would you have done differently?

A: With both my experiences in student teaching, and as a student, I appreciate all of the challenges and struggles that I went through. I am a big believer that your life is planned out how it should be and that you truly need to go through the valleys to appreciate the mountains. Some of my challenges and struggles in college were my valleys, but each moment taught me how to be a better teacher and person. They are the reason I am where I am today.

Q: What advice would you offer to a student teacher right now?

A: Allow yourself to be fully challenged by your experience. Don't take the easy route. Push yourself now so when you are on your own it'll feel natural. Ask your cooperating teacher to push you and question you. Trust me — it helps! With my experience in student teaching, I have been set up perfectly to feel confident in my own classroom.



FINDING HIS 'VOICE'

Alum Aaron Scott stars
on hit singing show

Aaron Scott, '07, was featured this fall on NBC's "The Voice." Scott passed his blind audition and stamped his ticket to Hollywood. Competing on the show, he says, was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

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For Aaron Scott, the road to stardom began in a dorm room.

In 2005-06, Scott was a junior at UW-La Crosse — spending his days studying art education, wishing he was on the football team, and experimenting with his friend's recording software.

It was the last of these pastimes that led to Scott's recent and remarkable appearance on NBC's "The Voice," where he broke through the round of blind auditions and stamped his ticket to Hollywood.

"I was always interested in music — growing up, my mom played piano and



Aaron Scott

was a singer at our church," notes Scott, '07, a special education teacher in the Tomah Area School District. "But it was my friend, Micah Juliot, who taught me guitar and made some music with me there in Coate Hall, that really sparked my interest. I joined a band with some friends after graduation, and that's when I got into my groove in terms of genre, style of music, and vocal tone."

Scott, a native of Wilton, never dreamed he would appear on "The Voice," or on any TV show.

As a teacher, husband, and father of three, he wasn't exactly flush with time to devote to his craft. He was content just to write an occasional song with his band, One Way North, and to rock out on weekends and at regional festivals.

But everywhere he went, Scott heard varying versions of the same comment: "You're not just good — you're special. You should be on 'The Voice.'"

Reluctant, but curious, Scott began watching the show last fall. It wasn't until a final nudge from his principal — "What are you doing teaching? You should be a singer." — that he decided to apply.

In January, Scott went to Nashville for preliminary auditions. Of the many thousands who apply, only a tiny fraction gets to audition in front of the show's panel: Blake Shelton, Gwen Stefani, Kelly Clarkson, and John Legend. Scott was among the chosen few.

The blind audition would be the biggest performance and brightest spotlight of his life.

"It was a whirlwind, an absolute whirlwind," says Scott, who decided to sing "Hemorrhage (In My Hands)" by Fuel — a grunge rock song released in 2000. "Managing your emotions and nerves ... I still don't know how I was able to do it. And because of COVID, we were only able to meet with our vocal coaches virtually. So, when it came time for the blind audition, I couldn't see them in person or get any pointers or positive vibes. I was on my own."

That loneliness didn't last long.

Scott knew his wife, Lorraine, and children were supporting him from a distance, watching a live feed of the audition back home.

Then, about 15 seconds into Scott's performance, as the song built to its first crescendo, Legend slapped the red button that turns his chair to face the stage — a trademark of the show. Legend wanted Scott on his team.

Shelton followed by pressing his button, and after powering through the rest of the song, Scott was faced with a choice.

Ultimately, he opted to join the country legend Shelton over the pop pianist Legend. But it wasn't Scott's singing that left the deepest impression with his students in Tomah.

The day after the episode aired, all his students could talk about was how Scott had winked at Clarkson after she complimented his song choice.

"They thought that was so cool," he says. "They couldn't believe I winked at her."



Through the fall, Scott's students begged him for spoilers. Subsequent episodes of "The Voice" had been filmed at the end of the summer, so Scott was teaching at the same time he was an active contestant on TV.

"They kept asking: 'Can you tell us what happened? Can you tell us what happened?'" he says. "And I had to keep saying: 'No, I'm not allowed to tell you anything.'"

Scott's time on "The Voice" ended in an episode that aired Nov. 16. He was knocked off in the Battle round after he and his teammate performed "Have You Ever Seen the Rain?" by Creedence Clearwater Revival.

That exit did nothing to diminish what Scott described as a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

"I heard from so many people in Tomah and the Coulee Region — even from people I don't know — that they were happy something good finally happened in 2020," he explains. "Just to hear that

positive feedback from the community ... that would have been more than enough to convince me it was worth it.

"The second thing was the validation. Part of me doubted if I would even have a chance, if they'd even think I was good. But now I don't have to look back and wonder, because I did it. And there are thousands and thousands of people who tried and didn't make it."

Getting voted off "The Voice" might seem like an ending. But to Scott, it's a beginning — a chance to more aggressively pursue his aspirations in music.

When COVID subsides, Scott plans to continue playing festivals around the Coulee Region and across the Midwest.

He plans to write new music with his fellow bandmates, and launch a solo endeavor featuring more of an acoustic sound and intimate feel.

Scott rehearses in the studio with teammate and fellow contestant Ian Flanigan. The pair performed Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Have You Ever Seen the Rain?" during the show's Battle round.

And he plans to return to where it all started, UW-La Crosse, whether it's for a concert or to speak to students about his experience.

"That school has so many memories and so many ties to where I am today," he says. "In some ways, my life started at UWL, from humble beginnings in Coate Hall!"

ALUM NOMINATED FOR ROLE IN BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

**Cindy Marten would serve as
deputy secretary of education**



Cindy Marten

A UW-La Crosse alum has been nominated to help lead the U.S. Department of Education.

Cindy Marten, who earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education from UWL in 1988, will serve as deputy secretary of education in the Biden Administration, pending confirmation by the Senate.

Marten has been a dedicated educator throughout her career, having served as a classroom teacher, instructional leader, principal and — most recently — superintendent of the San Diego Unified School District.

As the second-ranking official in the Department of Education, Marten would be responsible for helping develop and implement the new administration's education agenda.

Following her nomination, Marten tweeted her excitement about working with Miguel Cardona, Biden's nominee for education secretary.

"I am honored to serve alongside (Miguel Cardona) to restore our education system — putting teachers, students, and parents first," she said. "Work Hard. Be Kind. Dream Big. Let's do this!"

Marten has often cited her years at UWL as a formative time in her development as an educator.

"I give credit to UWL for providing me with a very solid education," she said in 2013. "UWL started as a teacher's college, and those roots run deep — providing me with a traditional and strong foundation."

Marten is the inaugural recipient of UWL's Burt and Norma Altman Teacher Education Award, which honors and recognizes outstanding educators and the significant contributions they make to children and communities. Professor Emeritus Burt Altman and his beloved wife, Norma, long-time supporters of teacher education, created the award in 2015.

DOING HER PART

Samantha
Griesbach



UWL student donates culturally responsive books to Wisconsin schools

As an aspiring teacher, Samantha Griesbach watched the social injustices that dominated the news cycle last summer and decided to do something about it.

Griesbach, a senior majoring in Early Childhood-Middle Childhood Education, set out to raise as much money as she could, with the idea of donating culturally responsive books to schools near her hometown of Stratford, Wisconsin.

By the end of the summer, she had raised \$1,200 and donated 150 books to six area schools.

“My overall goal was to help create a foundation for a more culturally responsive, kind, and compassionate generation,” she explains. “The support I received from everyone was overwhelming. This donation allowed each classroom in every school to have at least one new book in their room.”

Griesbach notes that she didn’t begin to learn about cultural

responsiveness until college. By then, she realized how critical it was for students to be exposed to these themes at a young age. Recent social injustices, including the police killing of George Floyd, further inspired her to pitch in.

“After seeing these injustices and how the climate of our nation was, I thought I should do what I could to try to make a change and take action,” she says. “The best way I knew how to do this was by finding books that exposed children to cultures and perspectives they may not have been introduced to before and eliminating stereotypes involving race, religion, gender, etc.”

Griesbach has even used her book selections in her first grade student teaching placement at Northwoods International School in La Crosse, reading to students and discussing how the books’ lessons can be used in everyday life.

Her students’ favorite books have included “I am Peace,” “I am One,” and “I am Love” — part of a series by author Susan Verde.

There’s no telling how big of an impact even one book can make, she notes, especially at a time when children are developing their worldview and a global perspective.

“Culturally responsive books, and books about kindness and compassion (in general), can be such an easy way to start a conversation and raise awareness with young children,” she says.

Terrificteacher

Alum recognized for outstanding career in physical education

Penny Kroening never got complacent.

In 33 years as a physical education teacher with the School District of Waukesha, Kroening never recycled a lesson plan, got stuck in her ways, or stopped seeing students as unique individuals.

"I wanted kids to feel like I had been waiting all day for them to come to my classroom," says Kroening, '85, this year's recipient of the UWL Burt and Norma Altman Teacher Education Award. The award is given to an outstanding educator who has made significant contributions to the children, schools, and communities they serve. "Kids are different, they're always changing, and so I needed to change the way I teach, too. I needed to find a way to light that fire for them."

Kroening retired from teaching in 2018 and currently serves as the executive director of the Wisconsin Health and Physical Education Association. The WHPE provides support and professional development opportunities for health and physical education teachers across Wisconsin.

Even before COVID-19 forced many K-12 schools online, Kroening says physical education was transforming.

During the arc of her career, Kroening saw fundamental changes in the way physical education is taught in public schools. In the 1980s, there was a heavy emphasis on traditional team sports — basketball, soccer, volleyball — as well as more rigid rules and expectations.

Kroening, and many other forward-thinking teachers, soon realized that not every student was cut out to be point guard or goalkeeper. She began introducing her students to more obscure sports and lifelong hobbies. Often, these lessons touched on core, academic topics and required collaboration with classroom teachers.

For one unit, Kroening worked with teachers to ensure that students had a sound understanding of latitude and longitude. Then she organized a geocaching expedition on the school's 40-acre grounds.

For another unit, Kroening leaned on students' knowledge of science and engineering. She had them design and build their own snowshoes, which they tested and perfected during the unit.

"It's all about finding that sport or activity that will be that spark, and it's going to be different for each kid," she explains. "A majority of kids aren't going to play basketball or volleyball all their lives. So how do we build that physical literacy so we can find the activity they want to do, and then do it with confidence?"

Kroening also made activities as open-ended as possible, allowing students to choose their own equipment and, in some cases, make their own rules.

"It's like if you were teaching badminton or pickleball," she says. "Why are you teaching the sport when you could be teaching the skill of striking? You can allow students to

“A majority of kids aren’t going to play basketball or volleyball all their lives. So how do we build that physical literacy so we can find the activity they want to do, and then do it with confidence?”

Penny Kroening

decide how they learn — whether that’s with different types of rackets; whether that’s with a birdie, a Nerf ball, or a tennis ball; whether that’s with a low net, a high net, or no net.”

Kroening’s student-centered approach toward health and physical education has earned her a strong reputation and several awards.

In 2015, the Wisconsin Health and Physical Education Association named her Wisconsin’s Elementary Physical Education Teacher of the Year, which qualified her for the regional competition.

From there, Kroening was named Midwest Elementary Physical Education Teacher of the Year and, ultimately, National Elementary Physical Education Teacher of the Year by the Society Of Health And Physical Educators.

“Those awards allowed me to do amazing things, traveling around the country and sharing best practices with other teachers,” she says. “It was a great experience.”



Penny Kroening

Penny Kroening, ‘85, has received a 2020 Burt and Norma Altman Teacher Education Award for her remarkable career as a physical education teacher. “It’s always been my passion to meet kids where they are and help them feel empowered,” she says.

The Burt and Norma Altman Award is particularly meaningful, she says, because it recognizes teachers who are not just skilled at their craft, but impactful in the lives of their students.

“It’s always been my passion to meet kids where they are and help them feel empowered,” she says. “What an honor to be put forward for this award. I’m so humbled to be selected for it.”



Burt and Norma Altman congratulate Cindy Marten, the inaugural winner of UWL's Burt and Norma Altman Teacher Education Award.

A LASTING LEGACY

Burt Altman and his late wife, Norma, have been devoted to giving back

Burt and Norma Altman lend their names to the School of Education's annual alumni awards. But how much do you know about these longtime educators and supporters of UWL?

After Norma's passing on Dec. 25 at age 89, Burt agreed to share some details about himself and his late wife, including their motivation for starting the Burt and Norma Altman Teacher Education Award for Distinguished Alumni.

Burt, a native of Chicago, worked as a teacher and principal near his hometown before accepting a job as a professor at Wisconsin State University in La Crosse (now UWL), where he spent the next 28 years.

Norma, born in Oak Park, Illinois, was a teacher for nearly four decades, spending much of her time at Central High School and Hamilton Elementary School in La Crosse.

After retiring in the early 1990s, the couple became heavily involved with Learning in Retirement, a group that offered non-credit adult courses on topics such as politics, climate change, and computer science.

They also traveled the world with other retired teachers, learning about the values and education systems of other countries.

Over the years, Burt and Norma have been unfailingly generous with their time and resources, volunteering with many local organizations and donating funds to meaningful causes.

Their enduring legacy can be seen through their immense support of UWL.

Q: Why did you create a fund through the UWL Foundation to support the School of Education?

A: Norma and I wanted to support the School of Education as a leader in teacher preparation. This fund allows the dean of the School of Education to spend the money with very few restrictions. This fund is the only one on campus that includes food and fun as allowable expenses, and we encourage it to be used in that way. It was very important to Norma and me that these funds be used to heighten faculty morale and interconnection by supporting social functions. We also wanted to provide funds that allowed the

dean to support the unit in any way she sees fit, including professional development, networking, etc. Another priority was to support the vision of the dean, so she could fund innovative projects that help the SOE continue to stand out as one of the strongest educator preparation programs in the state and country.

Q: Along these same lines, why did you decide to create the Burt and Norma Altman Teacher Education Award for Distinguished Alumni?

A: All the other colleges on the campus had established distinguished alumni awards, and I thought that we could not be left out! That being said, we established this fund to recognize and reward outstanding teachers. One of the most notable of the group was Cindy Marten, an elementary school principal (and later a superintendent) in San Diego, who did her undergraduate work at UWL. Norma, myself, and other emeriti faculty members who were vacationing in California at the time had dinner with her and were awed by her demeanor. She said at the dinner, "I attribute all of my success to the education at UWL."

Q: What advice would you share with future teachers in the UWL School of Education, specifically with all the demands of teachers today?

A: The demands placed on teachers today are not unique. Pressure has always been placed on teachers. One characteristic good teachers have in common is to be open-minded. Great teachers enter their classrooms well prepared to teach. By this, I mean they're planning for instruction that is carefully crafted and well thought out. They also exhibit a positive self concept, know what they are doing, and execute it well. They have to come prepared, be knowledgeable on the subject matter, and they have to be able to evaluate what they have done. Ultimately, they have to carefully plan their lessons and develop them in such a way that students have an "ah ha" moment. The teacher is there to help them to learn and then to understand. Promising educators must profess their values. They must know the difference between right and wrong, good and bad, and just and unjust.



Mirm Hurula, a former Early Childhood - Middle Childhood Education major at UWL, took fifth place in the America's Best College Poet Competition last fall. Hurula credits poetry with their growing confidence and openness with others.

For Mirm Hurula, writing a poem doesn't feel so different from going to the gym.

"It's like any muscle in the body — you have to work it out and it'll eventually become muscle memory," says Hurula, a former Early to Middle Childhood Education major. And much like exercise, they say that writing and performing poetry has helped make them the strongest version of themselves.

"At the beginning, it was difficult for me to perform and to be vulnerable at all," they explain. "I did not have good

But after taking a speech class with communication studies Professor Dena Huisman, and after getting involved with a pair of groups on campus (Awareness through Performance and Students Educating & Embracing Diversity), Hurula felt the support needed to begin putting their feelings to paper.

"Those groups and that space is very conducive for writing and expressing yourself fully without feeling like you're being judged," notes Hurula, whose first poem, "My Body is My Own," touched on the trauma they felt as a femme person in their male-dominated high

Hurula's other passion is education, which should be no surprise given their family history. Their dad is a high school teacher, their mom is a childcare director, their paternal grandma worked the front office at an elementary school, and their maternal grandparents were known as amazing teachers of culture and skills in their village of Poutasi, Samoa.

"I believe that it's in my blood that I become a teacher, in whatever capacity that means," they say.

Hurula hopes to teach in a major city, preferably in the western United States.

Powerful poetry

Former student earns strong finish in national competition

experiences in high school, and I put up a lot of walls between people and myself. Those are still there, but significantly less. And I think that's because of poetry."

Last fall, Hurula showed off their work on a national stage during the America's Best College Poet Competition, earning a fifth-place finish among a field of roughly 25 student poets.

"While I sadly did not win," they say, "I could not be happier with it being my first poetry competition."

Much of Hurula's poetry is inspired by gender-based discrimination and other traumatic situations.

Earlier in their life, Hurula might have kept that trauma locked in their head.

school weight room. "I try to write as much as I can because it is one of my coping mechanisms. But life is busy, and I honestly need to make more time for it."

As Hurula recently learned, poetry has been part of their life for longer than they can remember. They did some cleaning around their childhood home and discovered that they had been writing bits and pieces of poetry since they were very young.

"Though the forefront of my writing in elementary and middle school mostly consisted of short stories and novels," they say, "I see different points of my writing where I began to dabble with the poetic side of literature."

Later, they plan to attend graduate school and earn a doctorate, and eventually do some educational work in Poutasi, helping create opportunities for others.

They also expect writing to continue to be a central part of their life.

"It has been a childhood dream of mine to become an author," Hurula says. "I'm interested in writing children's books, poetry, novels and anything that fits under the statement: 'I get to write the story.' I don't know if I'll make it a sole career path, but if the opportunity presents itself, I'm going to take it."



Mai Chao Duddeck

Be Gentle.
Be Kind.
Be You.

Written by Mai Chao Duddeck

Roza Nozari's (i.e., @Yallaroza) words could not be any truer in these difficult times. As current and future educators, taking care of ourselves and our communities has been hard as we navigate the challenges of 2020. Do you know that social justice educators see self-care as a form of activism through the intentional act of self-love? By taking care and soothing ourselves first, we can continue the work of supporting others.

Revolutionary Self-Care shared a message on social media from Black Girls Can Heal, Inc. that listed nine ways to be kind to yourself. These include: (a) Focus on what's within your control, (b) Set boundaries and stick to them, (c) Be patient with yourself — healing/change doesn't happen overnight, (d) Limit your social media intake/pay mind to who and what you're following on social media, (e) Give yourself permission to rest, (f) Take care of yourself first, then tend to the needs of others, (g) Limit your news intake — set a time limit, (h) Say no without an explanation, and (i) Take note of when you're pushing yourself too hard. Do you know that self-soothing is another form of self-care? Here are six ways to try self-soothing from @maisieghost: (a) Positive self-talk, (b) Have a shower or bath, (c) Get some sleep, (d) Listen to music, (e) Meditate and hydrate, and (f) Take some deep breaths.

I leave you with the words of Thich Nhat Hanh who said, "All the wonderful things that you are looking for - happiness, peace, and joy can be found inside of you. You do not need to look anywhere else." Please indulge in moments of self-love by being gentle and being kind to yourself.

FOR ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SUPPORT, CHECK OUT THESE ORGANIZATIONS:

- Aptiv | aptiv.org | 608.784.9450
- Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge
blacklax16.wixsite.com/blackinc | 608.352.8082
- Cia Siab, Inc. | ciasiabinc.org | 608.615.7117
- Centro Latino | centrolatinolacrosse@gmail.com | 608.515.9134
- Coulee Cap | couleecap.org | 608.782.4877
- First Teen Clothes Closet | firstlutheranonalaska.org/clothescloset | 608.783.2236
- Independent Living Resources | ilresources.org | 608.787.1111
- La Crosse County Health Dept. | 300 4th St. N. | 608.785.9723
- La Crosse Housing Authority | 615 Plain View Rd, Lax | 608.781.5365
- Leaders Igniting Transformation | litmke.org
- New Horizons & Outreach | nhagainstabuse.org | 608.791.2610
- The 7 Rivers LGBTQ Connection | 7riverslgbtq.org | 608.784.0452
- The Trevor Project | thetrevorproject.org | 866.488.7386
- Trans Lifeline | translifeline.org | 877.565.8860
- The Parenting Place | theparentingplace.net | 608.784.8125
- The Salvation Army of La Crosse County | SAlacrosse.org | 608.782.6126
- Onalaska Food Basket | 735 Sandlake Rd | 608.783.7722
- RAVE, 1806 State St., Lax | 608.785.9615
- St. Clare Health Mission | stclarehealthmission.org | 608.519.4633
- WAFER and Hunger Task Force of La Crosse | lacrossehtf.org | 608.793.1002
- YWCA Social Services | ywcalax.org | 608.781.2783

Top-notch teacher

Roberts recognized for outstanding work with varied age groups



Charlotte Roberts, an assistant professor in UWL's Educational Studies Department, was named a Top Notch Teacher by WKBT News 8 in August. "I love research and being on the forefront of scholarship," she says. "But the pure enjoyment comes from building a community of learners that strive to support each other through their education journey."

Charlotte Roberts can trace her career path all the way back to her childhood classrooms.

Growing up, Roberts was so inspired by her teachers that she decided to become one herself.

"I truly wanted to give back to those who had given so much to me," she says. "I was a struggling student in many ways, and the constant support from my teachers empowered me to want to support others in their journey to thrive."

And that's exactly what she's done.

Roberts, Ph.D., has worked as an elementary school teacher in North Carolina and, for the past two years, as an assistant professor in the Educational Studies Department at UW-La Crosse.

In August, she was featured as a Top Notch Teacher by WKBT News 8 — a testament to her work with students of all ages.

"I love research and being on the forefront of scholarship, but the pure enjoyment comes from building a community of learners that strive to support each other through their educational journey," she explains. "My enjoyment comes from the students ... and helping them navigate life's happenings beyond the walls of our classroom."

After deciding on a career in teaching, Roberts attended Meredith College, a small, private liberal arts school in her home state.

She earned her licensure in K-12 education and spent seven years teaching primarily fourth and fifth grades in the Wake County Public School System in North Carolina. All the while, she never forgot about her own education.

While teaching full-time, Roberts worked toward her master's degree in K-12 Reading from Meredith College.

Eventually, she left her elementary classroom in hopes of diversifying her experiences, spending a gap year teaching at the college level and in a special needs education center.

She then pursued her doctorate in curriculum and instruction, with a focus on social studies education, from North Carolina State University.

She came to work at UWL after a national search for the right job opportunity.

"When I interviewed with UWL," she notes, "I felt a strong sense of community among the School of Education and, more specifically, the Department of Educational Studies."

Teaching and connecting with young children is not so different from teaching and connecting with college students, she says.

"Regardless of age, students need their basic needs to be met," she says, listing access to food and shelter, mental health support, and a sense of safety among them.

"Often, society presumes basic needs are met once students attend college," she continues. "These presumptions are far from the truth. Not only did I



experience situations of uncertainty as a student, but I bear witness to these uncertainties when I help students sign up for the food pantry, walk them to the Counseling Center, help them find access to our clothing closet, and so many other systems of support. This is not far removed from the support provided to the elementary school students I served."

These struggles have been especially prevalent during COVID-19. When Roberts meets with her students, she carves out time for the class to discuss how their lives are going, how the pandemic is affecting them and how they'll need to adjust to COVID-19 in their future classrooms.

She's also known to give the students a firsthand account of how gratifying it is to work with younger children.

Charlotte Roberts leads a class during the fall semester. During COVID-19, Roberts says she has carved out more time to check in with students on a personal level.

"Regardless of the time spent with my elementary school students and my college students, I try to embrace every challenge and take in each moment of time I do have to spend with them," she says. "With that said, and my college students are very aware of this sentiment, I miss the elementary school classroom every day."



Brock McMullen



Rob Dixon

\$1.25 MILLION

Funds will bolster UWL's adapted phy ed, school psych programs

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse has received a \$1.25 million grant to help improve educational services for children with disabilities throughout the country.

The U.S. Department of Education grant over five years aims to better prepare state and nationally licensed adapted physical educators and school psychologists so they can enhance assistance and results for children with disabilities, ages 3-21.

Brock McMullen, Ph.D., director of UWL's Adapted Physical Education Teacher Preparation Program, says the grant will prepare students to work in an interdisciplinary special education environment — something necessary when they graduate and begin working in K-12 public schools.

“This grant will provide a unique interdisciplinary graduate experience through a variety of high-quality professional

development and hands-on opportunities with students with disabilities,” he explains.

McMullen says funding will help graduate students come together for regular interdisciplinary seminars to learn important information overlapping both disciplines. The seminars will bring in experts to present K-12 education issues, and allow those in the program to attend national conferences.

The grant will also help recruit high-quality graduate students by offering tuition assistance for those applying to the adapted physical education and school psychology programs. It will give students ample opportunities to take several classes together and collaborate.

McMullen says the La Crosse area will benefit from the grant. School districts will see more high-quality students in the two programs when they spend hundreds of hours in

Brock McMullen, director of UWL's Adapted Physical Education Teacher Preparation Program, works with a La Crosse area youth during an on-campus adapted sports program in 2019. UWL has received a \$1.25 million U.S. Department of Education grant to help improve educational services for children with disabilities.



their buildings being mentored and trained, he says. Also, students will collaborate in on-campus, community-based physical activity programs while interacting with local children with disabilities and their parents.

Rob Dixon, Ph.D., director of the UWL School Psychology Program, says the grant builds on the strong reputation of the two UWL programs. Through the grant process, he says that was evident when they easily gathered letters of support from state, regional, and national groups.

“These letters spoke to the positive perception our programs have, as well as supporting our vision for what they could become through these interdisciplinary opportunities and support to the graduate students,” Dixon says. “It is an exciting project that we are eager to get started on in order to bring our ideas into a reality.”

McMullen further attributes the grant's strength to retired Adapted Physical Education Program Director Garth Tymeson, who also contributed input in the application. Tymeson helped grow that program in his more than two decades on campus.

McMullen says administrators from school districts across the country regularly contact UWL for its graduates. He says the grant will only increase the number of high-quality students in both programs who will graduate and be employed in districts nationwide, expanding UWL's presence and impact throughout the U.S.

the goal surpassed

Inaugural Giving Day raises \$228,000 — including over \$7,000 for the SOE

The UW-La Crosse community came out strong during the university's inaugural Giving Day Dec. 1, raising thousands of dollars for scholarships, research, academic programming, and more.

From noon on Dec. 1 until noon on Dec. 2, 1,407 donors united to raise \$228,348 to transform lives at UWL — including 65 donors and \$7,100 for the School of Education.

One education student, Jessica, says her scholarship is helping bring her career goals into focus.

“Money has always been tight in my split family, so this generous scholarship will go a long way,” she says, noting that she has wanted to be a teacher since she was 8 years old. “UWL was clearly the best place for me to make these dreams come true.”

Giving Day aimed to rally UWL alumni, employees, parents, students, and friends in support of the university. Of the 1,407 donors, 49% identified as alumni, 39% identified as friends of UWL and 12% identified as UWL employees.

Taylor Wilmoth, annual giving director, says every donation made a difference — whether it was big or small, whether it came from a longtime donor or a first-time donor.

“This event really showed the power of private giving and collective effort,” she explains. “Whether you made your first gift or your 50th, whether you gave \$5 or \$500, what matters is that we did it together for UWL.”

UWL 
giving day

Thank you!