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UW System: Regents announce Academic Staff Excellence Awards for 2023

Posted on Monday, Jun 5, 2023

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MADISON, Wis.—The University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents will honor this year's recipients of the Academic Staff Excellence Awards at its next meeting in Milwaukee on June 9. These awards recognize exceptional service to the university and are the UW System's highest recognition bestowed on members of its academic staff.

"This year's outstanding award recipients reflect the breadth of initiatives conducted by our academic staff across the UW System," said Regent John W. Miller, chair of the selection committee. "Our honorees are committed to creating vital education programs to support student success, and the results are impressive."

Award recipients are selected for superior performance resulting in significant contributions to the department and institution; use of positive personal interaction to manage work changes; and a consistently creative approach that improves productivity and work quality. Each recipient is awarded $7,500.

The 2023 recipients include two individuals and one program:

Dr. Kathleen Hunzer, Director, Chancellor's Scholars, Honors Program, and Falcon Scholars, UW-River Falls.

Hunzer, a first-generation college graduate, has dedicated two decades of service to UW-River Falls, providing opportunity through higher education for underrepresented student groups and motivating students to become civically

engaged. She led a committee to reimagine the Honors Program to better serve students and promote more graduates, growing the program from 65 to more than 600 active students. Hunzer strives to create a community of support within the Honors Program, which has resulted in 89 to 95 percent retention. She collaborated to create and launch the Falcon Care Team, a holistic team dedicated to early interventions to proactively address student issues before they impair students' ability to graduate. In addition, she partnered to create the Striving Toward Academic Recovery (STAR) program, which pairs Honors student volunteers with first-year students on academic probation. During the pandemic, she served on committees to support students, created a weekly student newsletter for COVID updates, and advised a student team using social media to promote COVID protocols. She collaborated to launch Freddy's Pantry to meet food insecurity needs, which serves more than 200 students per month. She also helped create the first emergency fund program that provides grants to students to address barriers to success. Hunzer chaired the Autism Spectrum Disorder Transition Program Committee and the Accessibility and Abilities Committee. In 2018, she earned the Role Model for Equity Award from the American Association of University Women.

Ms. Laura Monahan, Museum Associate Director and Curator of Osteology, University of Wisconsin Zoological Museum, Department of Integrative Biology, UW-Madison.

Monahan has served as the de facto director of the UW Zoological Museum for the past 16 years. Under her leadership, the renowned center for research and education has flourished, expanding its ability to preserve and facilitate the study of vertebrate and aquatic animals. Through her administration and supervision of the museum, including fundraising and budgeting, Monahan creates and cultivates relationships with donors and has applied for grants resulting in more than $800,000 to support museum operations. She oversees participation in outreach opportunities, including exhibition development, presentations, tours, and events. She serves as curator for the Osteology collection and works to increase awareness of the museum. She secured funding to create modern museum quality storage and upgrade space to further enhance the collection and has initiated collaborations that encourage and facilitate use of the collections for research and teaching. She fostered existing relationships with specimen donors and established new relationships with outside institutions that resulted in a major increase in the number of specimens to nearly 750,000 specimens. Monahan developed the course Zoology 405, Introduction to Museum Studies in the Natural Sciences, which she has

taught for over 15 years to introduce students to natural history museums. She also oversees the museum internship program, which has provided more than 200 students hands-on experience in the museum field. Monahan earned the Academic Staff Excellence Mid-Career Award in 2018 and Early Career Award in 2013.

Early College Programs, UW-Green Bay.

Early College Programs stemmed from the desire to implement programs that could address the opportunity gap in Wisconsin. The programs can be divided into three categories: 1) Rising Phoenix, 2) Dual Enrollment Services, and 3) GEAR UP Services. They focus on providing high-quality and equitable access to higher education for high school students and some middle school students throughout Wisconsin. UW-Green Bay advocated thinking creatively and strategically about student engagement and support to ensure student retention and success. Staff collaborate and consult with high school administrators, counselors, and others to tailor program offerings and student support to address needs. Rising Phoenix is a signature dual enrollment program targeting underrepresented high school students, such as first-generation, racial/ethnic minorities, and/or low-income students. It has grown from serving 25 to 410 students since its start four years ago, representing 1,540 percent growth. Dual Enrollment Services, including College Credit in High School, Early College Credit Program, and the Dual Enrollment Access Academy, serve over 3,400 high school students each year, building partnerships with over 80 schools. GEAR UP, which stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, is a seven-year, $35-million grant received in collaboration with the Department of Public Instruction. This program works to close opportunity gaps in higher education by focusing on support and skill development for first-generation and low-income sixth through twelfth graders. Taken together, UW-Green Bay’s Early College Programs help students see higher education as a next step for those who may not have considered it previously.

Other members of the Academic Staff Excellence Awardsselection committee included Regent Robert Atwell, Regent Rodney Pasch, and Regent Joan Prince.

The committee also recognizes the important contributions of this year’s other nominees:

Individual nominees included Scott Berg, UW-Green Bay; Dawn Hays, UW-La Crosse; Kurt Leibold, UW Oshkosh; Craig Becker, UW-Parkside; Teresa Miller, UW-

Platteville; Laurie Petri, UW-Stevens Point; Angela Ruppe, UW-Stout; and Trish Allen, UW-Superior.

Program nominees included UW-La Crosse's Academic Advising Center and Career Services Office; UW-Madison's UniverCity Alliance; UW Oshkosh's Cooperative Academic Partnership Program; UW-River Falls' Laboratory Farm; UW-Stevens Point's Upward Bound; and UW-Stout's Instructional Resources Service.