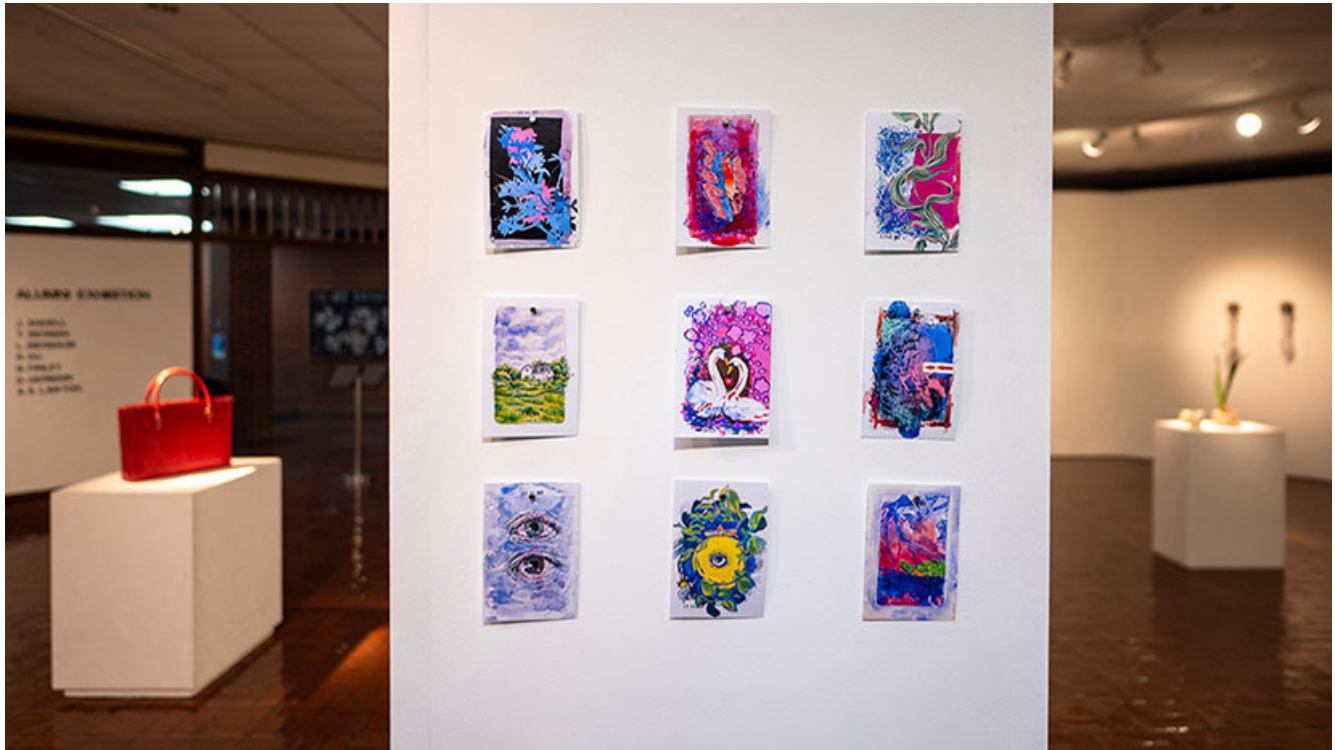




Nine sketchbook illustrations by artist Ann E. Lawton, foreground, part of her 90 selections from sketchbooks, January-December 2023, are part of the UWRF alumni art exhibition open through March 1 in Gallery 101 at UW-River Falls. UWRF photo.

Alumni art exhibition opening reception is Thursday

Jan. 23, 2024 - Please join the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Art Department on Thursday, Jan. 25, from 5-7:30 p.m. in Gallery 101 in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building for the opening reception of the Alumni Art Exhibition.

Representing diverse areas of studio practice and artistic interests, this group show features the work of exemplary UWRF graduates of the Bachelor of Fine Arts program. Exhibiting artists include Jenn Angell, '17; Taylor Berman, '15; Lynn Bierbaum, '15; Runze Du, '18; Ben Finley, '12; Danté Germain, '17; and Ann E. Lawton, '08.

The exhibition will be open Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. (or by appointment) through March 1. Viewing is free and open to the public.

Email kaylee.spencer@uwrf.edu for more information.



File photo by Liz Rust.

Dance Theatre to present annual spring concert Jan. 31-Feb. 3.

Jan. 23, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls Dance Theatre will present their annual spring concert Jan. 31-Feb. 3 at 7:30 p.m. in the Blanche Davis Theatre of the Kleinpell Fine Arts building, 420 E. Cascade Ave., River Falls.

The family-friendly free general admission event is open to everyone. Doors open at 7 p.m. and seating is on a first-come, first-served basis. The evening will include diverse dance forms including Modern, Afro-Peruvian, Ballroom, Jazz, Ballet, Charleston, Hip Hop, and Contemporary Dance performed by UWRF Dance Theatre alums, students, faculty, and professionals.

Choreographer Gisella Reyes staged an energetic Afro-Peruvian piece titled Festejo, using rhythm from the South-Central Coastal Department of Ica. Dancers focus their upbeat movement in their hips, arms, and feet. Mutationem, crafted by alumni choreographer Mary Coleman, is a beautiful, baroque-style vampiric ballet piece. Mutationem means “to change,” and as such, she uses partner work and prop symbolism that can represent any big change in life, not just being turned into a vampire. Into Our Moment, a contemporary trio self-choreographed by Student Choreographers Claire Brindley, Lily Callander, and Cassie Fay, invites the audience into a journey of their friendship through dance and as members of Dance Theatre. These choreographers use dynamic movements that come together and move back apart, much like the waves of life. Meep Mop Beep Bop, created by Faculty Choreographer Mari Kline-Kluck, is an upbeat Charleston dance number that will make you bounce in your seat. This full-company piece combines classic Charleston dance steps with a more contemporary jazz style.

UWRF Dance Theatre, a modern dance company, has brought an artistic dance program to students with a passion for dance for over 40 years. It strives to provide rich dance experiences and performances to River Falls and the surrounding communities.

For more information, contact Director Mari Kline-Kluck at 715-425-0743 or email mari.kline@uwrf.edu.



Casey Palbicki, lecturer of music at UW-River Falls, shows a Super Mario video game in his office at UW-River Falls. Palbicki has signed a deal with Kendall Hart Publishing to write a textbook about video game music and he will begin teaching a course on that topic next academic year. UWRF photo.

Fun and games: UW-River Falls professor writing book about video game music

Hoping new course will introduce students to various music types

Jan. 26, 2024 - Music experts and historians study and discuss notes, sounds, tones and chords of all kinds, and a University of Wisconsin-River Falls music professor hopes to bring more attention to a lesser-studied category of the genre: video game music.

Casey Palbicki, a lecturer of music at UWRF, has signed a deal with [Kendall Hunt Publishing](#) to write a textbook describing the making and cultural impact of video game music. The book is scheduled for release in October.

Palbicki previously wrote a textbook about music and movies for Kendall Hunt Publishers. When he proposed writing a book about video game music as a follow-up effort, the publisher was excited about it, Palbicki said.

"This is an unusual topic in the music world," he said, "and when I proposed it, the publishers jumped at it. It's not only that it's a different kind of music than what is typically studied, but that video games are increasingly relevant to a growing segment of our society."

Palbicki's book will help establish the curriculum for a new course he will begin teaching next academic year. Paul Budde, chair of the Music and Stage and Screen Arts Department at UWRF, said he is excited about Palbicki adding that class to the university's music course offerings.

"It's so important that we open doors to the exploration of music, including music beyond the canon of Western art music that has long dominated music study in the schools," Budde said. "There is so much incredible music out there. Kudos to Dr. Palbicki for opening pathways to explore it."

Writing and teaching about video games and the music that is part of them is a natural fit for Palbicki, combining his affinity for music and video games. But video game music is more than just fun and games, he said. Incorporating video games into the music education curriculum is a way to reach students who might not otherwise engage in musical study.

"Most students don't really know about classical music, or have an interest in it," he said. "But they know these video games and are interested in them. Studying the music of video games is one way to reach more students, to get them interested in the study of music and then link them to classical music and other styles."

Palbicki acknowledged that much of the scholarly music establishment doesn't necessarily view video game music as worthy of academic study. He begs to differ.

Composing music for video games incorporates the same process of matching music to different scenes and attempting to convey emotions through musical notes that composers use in the TV and movie industries, Palbicki said.

However, he said, creating video game music is a more-involved process. For example, composing music for an hour-long TV program typically requires 40 to 80 minutes of music that is then edited and included in the program. Composing music for a video game typically requires four to six hours or more, he said.

"There are so, so many short, individualized pieces that are combined into one video game, and each of them usually requires a different bit of music," Palbicki said.

Just like any music, video game music can be artistic and creative, he said. Programs that teach video game music also have a direct tie to future employment for students, he said.

"There are a growing number of job opportunities in this field, and I see that continuing," Palbicki said.

Palbicki sees another benefit to teaching video game music: the capacity to help bring a divided world a bit closer together.

"Video games have become part of so many cultures," he said. "They are one of the rare things in our modern world that seem to have the capacity to break down cultural barriers."

Major honor: School psychology graduate student awarded minority scholarship

Pa Dao Xiong one of only seven nationwide recognized for her talent, effort

Jan. 30, 2024 - A University of Wisconsin-River Falls student studying school psychology has been named one of just seven graduate students nationwide to receive the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) ERT Minority Scholarship Award for 2024.

Pa Dao Xiong will be recognized for the honor at the [NASP Convention](#) in New Orleans Feb. 14-17.



Xiong, who lives in St. Paul, Minn., is currently completing her practicum field experiences and will seek an internship for the fall semester. In addition to excelling in the school psychology program, which has courses during evenings, Xiong works full time at a nonprofit organization that assists in refugee humanitarian aid and disaster relief globally.

Xiong's dedication to her school psychology program while working full time is admirable, said Scott Woitaszewski, professor and director of the UWRF School Psychology Program who is also chair of the Counseling and School Psychology Department.

"Her ability to simultaneously juggle graduate school and employment – both quite successfully – reflects her work ethic and dedication to pursuing her dream of a career in school psychology," Woitaszewski said of Xiong.

In addition, Woitaszewski said, Xiong has a strong desire to assist those who most need help.

"Beyond Pa Dao's high level of work ethic, commitment and leadership skills, I view her perseverance and willingness to assertively address issues of social justice as distinguished personal strengths," he said.

Xiong joins two former UWRF school psychology graduate students – Brooke Fails Soupenne and Pa Lee – who have won the minority scholarship since 2009. Those accomplishments make UWRF's school psychology program among the most decorated nationwide regarding the NASP scholarship.

The NASP-ERT Minority Scholarship Program was established in 1995 to support graduate training of minority students pursuing careers in school psychology. The program seeks to lower financial barriers to training and to highlight the accomplishments of promising future professionals. It advances NASP's commitment to diversity in school psychology by supporting culturally diverse graduate students who will eventually provide school-based services to diverse student populations.

Recipients of the scholarship receive \$5,000 that goes toward paying for graduate school. That amount is significant,

Woitaszewski said, for students such as Xiong who are balancing school, work and other stressors. Scholarship winners also can talk with previous award winners who, like them, come from marginalized backgrounds.

“Our schools need more educators, including school psychologists, from backgrounds similar to the students they serve,” Woitaszewski said. “We know that makes schools stronger, more welcoming, and simply better places to learn for all students. This scholarship moves the needle on that goal.”

New hire to raise funds for athletic facilities and programs

Sekelsky returns to the university that launched his career and athletic endeavors

Jan. 25, 2024 - A former University of Wisconsin-River Falls student athlete who found his life's direction after enrolling at the university nearly three decades ago as a nontraditional student has been hired to raise money for his alma mater's Athletic Department.

Scott Sekelsky recently began working in a newly created position in the UW-River Falls Advancement Office. Sekelsky will focus on fundraising and creating partnerships to benefit the university's athletic programs. His hiring marks the first time UWRF has had a dedicated fundraiser for athletics.

"There is a lot to learn, but I am very excited about this new role," Sekelsky said. "My biggest motivation is I care about this place, and I want to see it succeed."



Sekelsky enrolled at UW-River Falls in 1996. He hadn't even heard of the university until a classmate at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities told him about the smaller campus just across the Mississippi River.

"I thought UW-River Falls might be a good fit for me," Sekelsky recalled. "It turns out it was."

At the time, Sekelsky was looking to get more physically fit. He hadn't previously been a distance runner but decided to join the UW-River Falls cross country team. He finished near the back of the pack in his first race, but he was hooked.

"That race lit a fire in me," Sekelsky said. "I discovered that cross country was something I really liked."

Sekelsky found his academic footing at UW-River Falls as well. He didn't know what he wanted to major in or do for a profession. But he discovered that he enjoyed exercise science and graduated with a degree in that discipline in 1998.

Following graduation, Sekelsky took a job at Western Wisconsin Health in Baldwin as that medical facility's fitness director, a job he held for a quarter century until his being hired at UW-River Falls.

Sekelsky later reconnected with his alma mater. He was hired in 2005 to coach the UW-River Falls women's cross country program, a job he held until 2014. During his tenure, Sekelsky coached six national qualifiers – including one national champion in the outdoor 5,000 meters in 2008 – and seven Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference individual champions. He was inducted into the UWRF Athletic Hall of Fame in 2021 as part of the coaching staff of the Falcons' 2008 national championship women's outdoor track and field team.

When Western Wisconsin Health built a new hospital in 2016, Sekelsky learned about raising money firsthand. As part of that effort, the fitness center portion of the facility where Sekelsky worked needed to raise \$2 million. Sekelsky was tapped to be

part of the fundraising team.

"I always wanted to do fundraising, but I never knew I was passionate enough about something to really do that," he said. "Then that opportunity came along, and I realized that project was something I really cared about."

Sekelsky helped raise money for the fitness center, experience he said will serve him well in his new role at UW-River Falls. Since his hiring, Sekelsky has spent time assessing athletic facility and program needs. The university will reintroduce baseball and men's soccer in the 2024-25 academic year, and Sekelsky plans facilities upgrades for those sports.

Rick Foy, assistant chancellor for university advancement, said Sekelsky's community connections, fundraising experience and ties to UW-River Falls make him the perfect fit for the new position.

"We're delighted to welcome Scott to the UWRF advancement team," Foy said. "His deep connection with Falcon athletics, combined with his proven and effective leadership, communication and fundraising skills provide a strong foundation for Scott's future success."

Sekelsky said he is focusing on building on his many existing relationships in the region, an effort intended to grow the UW-River Falls fundraising base. Among his goals is increasing the amount of money raised for athletics during the university's annual Giving Day fundraiser. He said he is eager to increase resources for the university where he found his place so many years ago.

"I'm passionate about this university. I'm excited to do everything I can do to help its athletic programs grow and succeed," he said.

To support UWRF Athletics, visit [Go Falcons](#).



A team of UW-River Falls students and their coach recently placed first in the National Forage Bowl Competition in Mobile, Ala. Left to right are Tucker Lundquist, Hannah Schull, Coach Yoana Newman, Ryan Bottema and Jace Heiman. UW-River Falls teams have won the last four Forage Bowl competitions they have competed in. Contributed photo.

Planting a tradition: UW-River Falls team wins National Forage Bowl Competition

Victory marks fourth successive win, showcases strength of crop science, horticulture programs

Jan. 17, 2024 - When it comes to all things big and small in forage production and management, University of Wisconsin-River Falls students definitely know their subject well.

A team of four UW-River Falls students placed first in the National Forage Bowl Competition, an event in conjunction with the American Forage and Grassland Council that occurred in Mobile, Ala., Jan. 7-8. UW-River Falls was the smallest university in the competition and topped large Division I schools, including other event finalist Purdue University.

UW-River Falls team members include Ryan Bottema, a sophomore from Maple Grove, Minn., majoring in horticulture; Jace Heiman, a senior from Kewaunee majoring in crop and soil science; Tucker Lundquist, a senior from St. Paul, Minn., majoring in crop and soil science; and Hannah Schull, a sophomore from Medford, Minn., majoring in crop and soil science.

Yoana Newman, associate professor of crop science who coaches the UW-River Falls Forage Bowl Team, said her students' smarts combined with a strong work ethic landed them the national victory.

"What can I say? This is an excellent group of students," Newman said when asked how her students won the competition. "They are a very motivated group and are very competitive. They put in a lot of work, a lot of study, to prepare for this event."

Team members acknowledged the many hours they spent preparing for the Forage Bowl. The students, who are members of a forage experiential learning class that Newman teaches, said learning the many details they would be tested on as part of the competition was daunting. They often met outside of class to prepare for the event.

"We studied very hard to prepare for the event in whatever ways we could find," Heiman said.

The Forage Bowl competition is modeled after the popular TV game show Jeopardy, in which contestants give answers in the form of questions about different categories. The UW-River Falls team won the first event stage, a plant identification exam, building an initial lead. They defeated other schools in the Jeopardy-like portion of the competition, advancing to the final against Purdue University.

When he and his UW-River Falls teammates won the final, Bottema felt a moment of disbelief, then exultation. Team members shook hands with the Purdue University team before wrapping each other in congratulatory hugs.

"It feels great that the smallest school won, not only because we won, but also because the other teams were cheering for us too," Bottema said.

While UW-River Falls was the smallest school in the event, it has perhaps the biggest reputation, courtesy of having won the previous three Forage Bowl competitions it competed in, from 2019-21. The coronavirus pandemic wiped out the competition in 2022, and last year UW-River Falls did not compete in the event.

This year's team said they felt pressure to live up to the success of past UW-River Falls performances. They credited Newman for their success, saying her detailed knowledge of plants of all sorts and her ability to teach them was invaluable.

"She told us that win or lose, she would still be proud of us," Schull said. "That helped us relax and do better in the competition, knowing that she had confidence in us."

Newman credited her past experience at Forage Bowl with helping prepare her students. In addition to challenging them, she said she also focuses on making learning fun. She said she is certainly proud of her team's accomplishment, a sign of the high-caliber students and strong science programs at UW-River Falls.

"Winning this event four times in a row, it isn't like we just got lucky," Newman said. "This is a tribute to UW-River Falls and the great work that our students and faculty are doing."

Science Olympiad at UW-River Falls showcases students' science successes

Event featured about 900 students from across the Midwest

Jan. 22, 2024 - Avantika Sivakumar held a mini-car in her hands and turned the back wheels one rotation after another according to a predetermined calculation that would determine how far the vehicle would travel when pushed forward by a weight-propulsion system.

"Eight, nine, 10," Sivakumar, a senior at Wayzata, Minn., High School, counted as her teammate and senior classmate, Raghav Goel, double-checked the wooden weight attached to a string of a certain length that would send the car forward. He taped an egg to the vehicle's front, a factor that gave the event its "Scrambler" title.

A moment later Sivakumar pulled the string, the weight dropped and the car sped forward about 40 feet, stopping a short distance from a small wall. A collision would have broken the egg.

"That was good!" Sivakumar told Goel. "Good work. Now let's see if we can get the car even closer (to the wall)."

Sivakumar and Goel were among about 900 high school students from across the Midwest who spent Saturday participating in science-related activities and competitions of all sorts as part of the Science Olympiad at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. The event marked the 12th Science Olympiad the university has hosted since the event was begun by UW-River Falls emeritus physics professor Earl Blodgett.

Sivakumar's and Goel's Wayzata team was one of 58 taking part in an array of activities with such titles as mystery architecture, virtual geocaching, disease detectives and robot tour. Students could participate in any of 27 different activities, all of them based on science in its many different forms and applications.

Science Olympiad is an international nonprofit organization created in 1984 to improve the quality of science education by increasing student interest and recognizing outstanding scientific achievement. Science Olympiad tournaments like the one at UW-River Falls are regional competitions. Qualifiers at those events qualify for state and national events.

"With the variety of event categories, we hope there is something for everyone here," said Jamie Schneider, Assistant Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and a chemistry professor who directed the Science Olympiad for the first time this year.

Schneider noted students' enthusiasm about the event, saying she was pleased to see "a lot of smiling and laughing going on." Those positive vibes were despite the fact that the event is designed to be especially challenging, at the level of difficult college science courses.

"How many people show up on a cold Saturday like this, excited to tax their brains and talk about science in an exciting way?" Schneider said. "You can't help but be impressed by these students."

Katie Marano, a junior at UW-River Falls majoring in geology/earth science, was similarly impressed. One of many Science Olympiad volunteers, as she watched students participate, she reflected on her experience at the event when she was a

senior at New Richmond High School.

After high school graduation, Marano attended the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. When she decided to change schools, she remembered her positive experience at UW-River Falls at the Science Olympiad. Today she is thankful she found her way to the school.

"I remembered my time at Science Olympiad and that led me to come to UW-River Falls," Marano recalled. "I knew the science programs here (at UW-River Falls) were really strong. I decided to come here, and it has worked out great for me."

Just like she did, Science Olympiad participants learn from the challenges the event presents, Marano said. That was the case for Will Engle and Jon Madison, sophomores at Boyceville High School, as they participated in the "Scrambler" event. Despite their meticulous calculations, their vehicle didn't perform the way they had planned.

"It was OK, but we were a little bit off. We could have done a little better," Engel said. "But that is how science is. You measure your results and you're constantly learning from what does and doesn't work."

Sivakumar and Goel had a similar experience. After their car's first trip toward the wall, Sivakumar wound its back wheels one extra turn to bring it just to the edge of the wall. But it didn't turn out that way, instead stopping even shorter than on the vehicle's first trip.

"Maybe it was the angle of the string when I pulled it," Sivakumar said afterward. "That's the fun of science, figuring out what factors are at play and figuring out how to do it better. This event is a great way to help us do that."

UW-River Falls to host event Feb. 5 highlighting the importance of Indigenous people

Speaker to focus on preserving Native American lands, cultures

Jan. 29, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls will host an address by a Native American educator on Monday, Feb. 5, about the importance of Indigenous lands and cultures and efforts to preserve and restore them.

The UWRF Politics, Geography and International Studies Department is collaborating with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Sustainability Faculty Fellow and the Student Social Work Association to bring Brian McInnes to campus. McInnes is an assistant professor in American Indian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and is a member of the Wasauksing First Nation.

McInnes will present “Talk on Local Indigenous Lands and Cultures and How Local Tribes are Working to Restore Each” at 4 p.m. in the Falcon’s Nest in the University Center, 410 S. 3rd St., River Falls. A traditional feast will follow McInnes’ presentation. The event is free and open to all. More information about the event is available [here](#).

McInnes has a deep interest in the preservation of Indigenous cultures and languages. He often speaks and makes presentations about Indigenous cultures. He previously was a teacher and administrator at the Waadookodaading Ojibwe Immersion School in Hayward and founded the [Enweyang Language Nest program](#) at the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

McInnes has also been a distinguished teaching professor at the University of Minnesota and the Leola R. Culver Professor of Philanthropy and Nonprofits at the University of Wisconsin.



About 900 students from Wisconsin, Minnesota and other Midwestern states will compete in the Science Olympiad event at UW-River Falls on Saturday, Jan. 20. The event is affiliated with the national Science Olympiad organization and is designed to increase interest in science and recognize scientific achievement. UWRF file photo.

UW-River Falls to host Science Olympiad competition on Jan. 20

Event to include about 900 high schoolers from across the Midwest

Jan. 4, 2024 - When about 900 high school students on 58 teams from Wisconsin, Minnesota and elsewhere across the Midwest convene at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls on Saturday, Jan. 20, they will exhibit their knowledge of and affinity for all things science.

Those students will take part in the Science Olympiad, a competition hosted each winter at UW-River Falls in conjunction with the university's science programs. This year's event marks the 12th Science Olympiad the university has hosted.

Earl Blodgett, UWRF emeritus physics professor, organized the first Science Olympiad at the university in 2012. In subsequent years the number of participants grew, a sign of the continued recognition of the important role science plays in society, he said, and of student interest in science-related fields.

The competition was interrupted because of the coronavirus pandemic, but participation is bouncing back, Blodgett said. Each team has up to 15 members.

"This event is all about sciences of all sorts," he said. "It's about celebrating the sciences and getting students to be

enthusiastic about science, to get them to think about science in new ways and to dig a bit deeper.”

Science Olympiad is an international nonprofit organization created in 1984 to improve the quality of science education by increasing student interest and recognizing outstanding scientific achievement. Science Olympiad tournaments like the one at UW-River Falls are regional competitions where students can qualify for state and national events.

High schools across the country compete in tournaments, which are designed to be rigorous. The events include a wide range of sciences in which students are tested, ranging from biology and earth sciences to chemistry, physics and technology. High school and college teachers design competition questions which are overseen by national Science Olympiad officials.

“These events are designed to be really hard,” Blodgett said, “so that they would be challenging even for a college junior or senior. The kids go into this knowing it is going to be really tough.”

While Science Olympiad is challenging, students step up to the challenge, Blodgett said. The event is intended to foster critical thinking skills and teamwork, he said.

“This event often covers concepts and ideas that students don’t typically see in their classrooms,” Blodgett said. “We really want to see students to use their critical thinking, communication and observational skills.”

Science Olympiad events at the UW-River Falls competition will occur at numerous campus locations. Blodgett and Jamie Schneider, UWRF chemistry professor who is tournament director of this year’s Science Olympiad, will work with a team of volunteers to coordinate many events happening simultaneously.

To prepare for the event, Schneider visited other Science Olympiad competitions. For the first time, this year’s event at UW-River Falls will include a resource fair designed to provide competitors with information about the university.

“This is a chance for those students to see our university, to get a feel for what it’s like here,” Schneider said. “We want to provide them with as much information as we can with the hope that maybe they will decide to attend college here.”

The event can certainly serve as a recruiting tool, Blodgett said, and a way to highlight the strong science programs at UW-River Falls. In addition to its focus on science, the event also showcases the joy of science, he said.

“When you see students work hard to come up with an answer, when they learn a new concept, and you see how much they enjoy it, those are the moments when you say, ‘this really works,’” Blodgett said.



Brianna Crotteau, project coordinator at the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence at UW-River Falls, hands Sam Galgowski, a cheesemaker at the dairy plant, a plastic container that Galgowski filled with cheese during production on Tuesday. The cheddar cheese produced was the first produced at the dairy plant that will serve as a production site and a training location for students and dairy industry employees. UWRF/Pat Deninger photo.

Big cheese: Successful cheddar production means UW-River Falls dairy plant is up and running

New, much-anticipated \$9 million facility will serve as site to train students, dairy industry employees

River Falls, Wis. – With one slice, then another and another, Sam Galgowski cut a large block of cheddar cheese at the bottom of a metal vat into smaller chunks.

Galgowski – cheesemaker at the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls – then lifted individual pieces of cheddar and packed them into round plastic containers before flipping the containers over so the cheese inside would drain and compact. Brianna Crotteau, project coordinator at the dairy pilot plant, smiled with relief.

“Hey, it worked. We have some cheddar cheese here,” Galgowski said. “We’re going to have some rounds of cheese.”

The successful finished product five hours after the milk that was processed into cheese was first pumped through the dairy pilot plant's tanks and pipes represented much more than a simple batch of cheddar.

The cheese is the first produced at the plant that has been a decade in the making and holds the aspirations of state of Wisconsin and dairy industry officials as a site to not only produce cheese and ice cream but to train UW-River Falls students and dairy industry employees to work in a modern dairy setting. The plant also will serve as a test site, a place to experiment with developing different varieties of cheese and ice cream.

Work began 11 years ago to begin building a new dairy pilot plant to replace the longtime plant at UW-River Falls that had become outdated. The old plant ceased operations in 2018 because of its antiquated equipment.

Former dairy pilot plant manager Michelle Farner worked with agriculture industry leaders and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, among others, to come up with funding to build the new plant, renamed the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence after \$1 million in donations helped make the plant a reality.

Outfitting the new plant took longer than anticipated and was delayed in part by the coronavirus pandemic. But Farner and others remained committed to the project, and in October, the new 6,000 square-foot, \$9 million plant was officially opened.

Farner subsequently took another job and was replaced by Rueben Nilsson, whose background making cheese in different settings makes him the perfect fit for the job, Farner said. Since taking over as dairy pilot plant manager, Nilsson has worked to get the plant up and running, working out kinks in the production equipment and process.

Making cheese on Tuesday was beset by early difficulties, but those were quickly remedied, and the process proceeded. Nilsson monitored electronic controls signifying whether the different equipment components were working together to ensure a quality end product.

"There are a lot of steps, a lot of different factors to keep track of to make sure everything is working as it should," Nilsson said in between checking two different monitoring screens. "There are a lot of different pieces of equipment that need to work together for this to work, and we're making sure that they're all talking to each other the way they're supposed to."

Tuesday's successful cheesemaking effort marks a significant milestone to get the much-anticipated dairy pilot plant up and running. Another will be ice cream production. Nilsson hopes to begin making ice cream in the plant soon. Those products will be sold at Freddy's Dairy Bar on campus under the brand name Falcon Creamery.

In addition to producing tasty, quality dairy products, the dairy pilot plant also will serve as a valuable training site. UW-River Falls student Makenzie Skibbie, a junior from Thorp majoring in food science and technology, has started working at the plant. She makes cheese in small batches with her mom and has worked at cheese production sites. She said the dairy pilot plant will be a valuable role in training her and others in a plant with state-of-the-art equipment.

"This site will educate us about how to work at modern dairies," she said. "When I get into the cheesemaking industry, I will look really good to employers, and I will come into my job with confidence."

Crotteau, of Cameron, who graduated from UW-River Falls in May, said the new dairy pilot plant enables students and others who train there to learn about all aspects of dairy production.

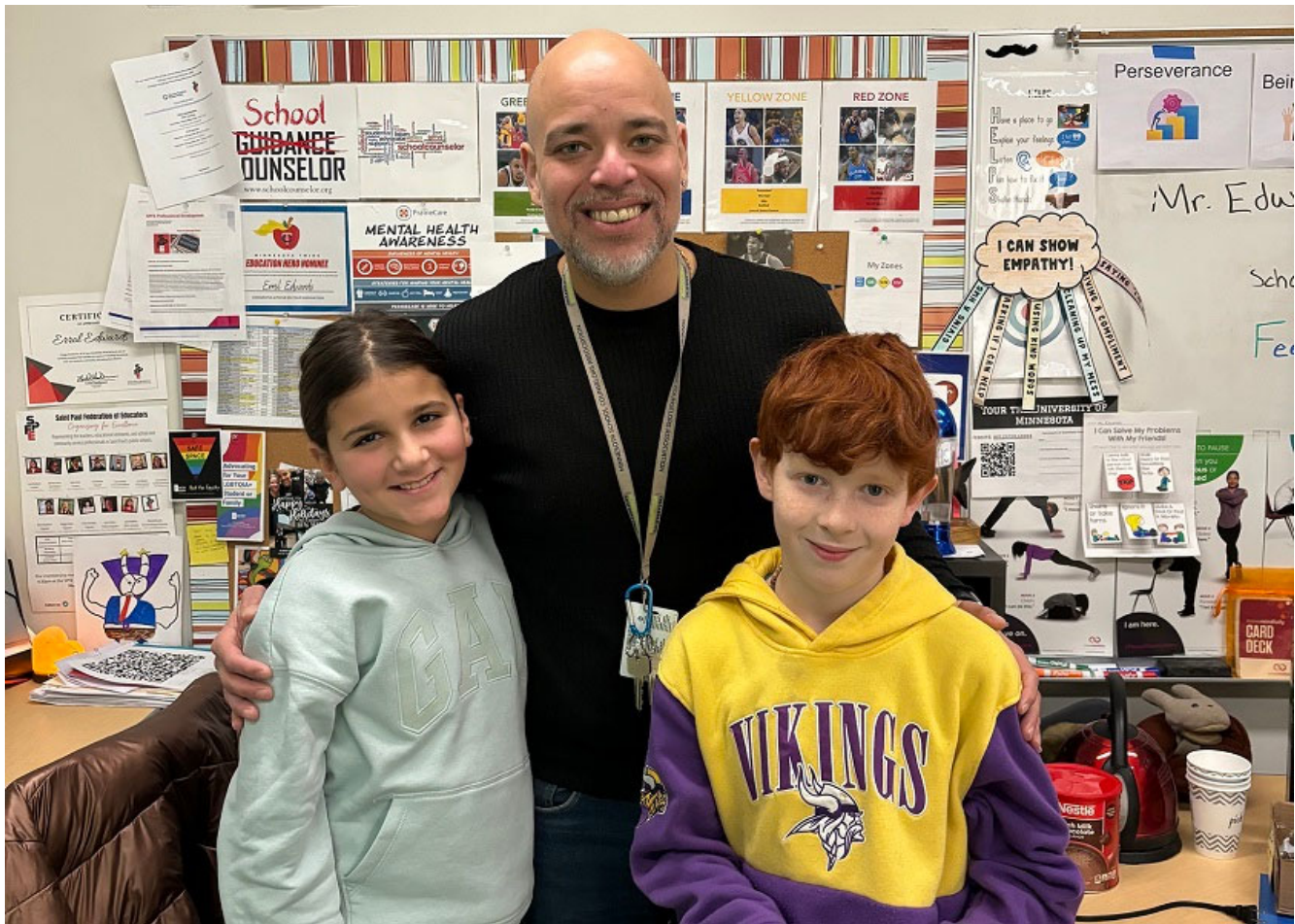
“They will be able to be a part of all the steps of this, from the milk being produced at Mann Valley Farm (which UW-River Falls operates), to all aspects of the production process, to being able to produce the finished product.”

On Tuesday afternoon, Nilsson was pleased to see that the final product had turned out well. Two weeks earlier a run through making cheese hadn’t gone smoothly. Last week his team successfully produced a small batch of cheese curds. Now they have a full batch of cheddar to their credit.

“It feels good that this one worked out,” Nilsson said. “Now we’re going to just keep making more cheese, keep refining the process and making this go better and better. We’re looking forward to having this plant serve as an educational site that produces high-level dairy products.”



UW-River Falls junior Makenzie Skibbie adds rennet to a batch of cheddar cheese being produced Tuesday at the university’s Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence. Rennet promotes curdling, helping transform milk into cheese. UWRF/Pat Deninger photo.



Errol Edwards, who got his start in college at UW-River Falls, has been named the 2024 Minnesota Elementary School Counselor of the Year. He credits his time at UW-River Falls with starting his path toward his current job and award. He currently works with elementary school students. Photo courtesy of Errol Edwards.

Recipient of statewide education award got his start at UWRF Edwards named Minnesota School Counselor of the Year

February 15, 2024 – The recipient of the 2024 Minnesota School Counselor of the Year Award works in a large metropolitan school district and recently received recognition for his award under the bright lights of a national education conference in Washington, D.C.

Errol Edwards, school counselor at St. Anthony Park Elementary School, part of St. Paul Public Schools, however, points to his time as a student at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls as a formative period that put him on the path to his current life situation.

That Edwards would grow up to work in education might seem like a forgone conclusion, given that both his mother – Linda

Loverude, a UW-River Falls alum – and grandmother worked as teachers. But Edwards wasn't an education major when he enrolled at UW-River Falls after graduating from Como Park Senior High School in St. Paul. Instead, he was studying kinesiology and was on the football team. Edwards, who is biracial, was co-president of the African American Alliance at the university and enjoyed traveling to other Universities of Wisconsin schools to advocate for Brown and Black students.

His experience with the African American Alliance spurred his desire to help others, Edwards said. And his friendships with students who were going to school to be teachers or school counselors prompted him to question whether that might be his career path.

"I remember walking past the education building on campus and thinking 'maybe that is what I want to do,'" Edwards recalled. "And at that same time, I began to realize that I was a helper. That was a time in my life when I started to figure out that I wanted to change people's lives for the better. My time at UW-River Falls served as the beginning of the journey that got me to where I am now."

Despite that, Edwards' educational journey took a detour. After two years at UW-River Falls, he left the university to work in real estate. He did that job for six years until the housing sector collapsed in 2008. He left that profession and began coaching basketball, which led to a job working as a special education assistant in the Minneapolis Public School District.

Edwards subsequently decided to enroll in Metro State University, where he obtained his bachelor's degree. He then obtained his master's degree in counseling at Adler Graduate School in Richfield, Minn., and was hired at Barack and Michelle Obama Elementary School in St. Paul, where he worked for four years. He then moved to St. Anthony Park Elementary School, where he is in his second year.

As he taught in classrooms, Edwards has recognized the major stressors many of his students face, factors that often impair their mental health and adversely impact their learning.

"I can see firsthand the amount of stress going on in these kids," Edwards said, "and I can use the trauma-informed practices I have learned to try to address those situations. It feels good to know that I am actually making a positive difference in my students' lives."

Edwards was nominated for his statewide education counseling award by his elementary school counseling peers. He attended a national conference to receive his award from the American School Counselor Association in Washington, D.C., earlier this month with the other 2024 state school counseling award winners.

Calling his time at the national conference "an amazing experience," Edwards said he is humbled with the honor. He appreciates the opportunity to meet other educators at the conference and exchange ideas.

"It was a powerful experience to meet with all these other educators," he said. "When you all come together in one place and talk about ideas, you know you can get through the hard work."

Working as a school counselor is definitely challenging, Edwards said, especially given mounting mental health problems and reactions to trauma he sees in students. Meeting their needs when they are young gives them a better chance of having success as older students, he said, a key factor prompting him to work at the elementary school level.

In addition to his job as a school counselor, Edwards is professional development coordinator in the St. Paul teachers union,

a role in which he oversees professional development for educators to help them interact with students effectively. He is an advocate for continuing to expand mental health and other counseling services, especially at the elementary school level, and for a more equitable system.

Each time he enters the school where he works, Edwards reminds himself to focus fully on his students' needs, to help them reach their full potential. And he recalls the circuitous, sometimes challenging path he has taken to be in a position to help them.

"Becoming counselor of the year, and to see where I am today is pretty surreal," Edwards said. "Maybe this is the way it was always supposed to work out, with education being in my blood with my grandma and my mom. Being in education has really lifted me up, and I'm so grateful for the work I do."

Speaker to discuss food industry as part of Wyman Speaker Series

February 21, 2024 – Joshua Specht, an expert on the food industry and its varied societal impacts, is the featured speaker for a Wednesday, March 6, presentation for the Walker and Helen Wyman Performing Arts and Speaker Series at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.



Specht's presentation "Work in the Slaughterhouse, Work in the Kitchen: A Historical Perspective on the Possibilities and Limits of Food Politics," is from 4:40-6 p.m. in the North Hall Auditorium, 410 S. 3rd St., River Falls. The event is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

In his presentation, Specht, associate professor of history at the University of Notre Dame, will examine labor along the food supply chain and how people attach meaning to the foods we prepare and consume. He will discuss how those perceptions, in turn, impact such issues as prices, environmental impacts and labor related to the food industry, and whether society can escape those dynamics.

Specht's work focuses on the intersections of work, environments, markets and identity. His book, "Red Meat Republic: A Hoof-to-Table History of How Beef Changed America," was published by Princeton University Press in 2019.

The event is sponsored by the Walker D. and Helen Bryant Wyman Endowment. For more information about the event, call 715-425-4170 or email john.ryan.fischer@uwrf.edu.

Stage and Screen Productions to present staged reading of '10 Out of 12'

February 26, 2024 – Stage and Screen Productions at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls will present a free staged reading of "10 Out of 12" March 7-8 at 7:30 p.m. in the Sanford Syse Black Box Theatre in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building.

The production is written by award-winning playwright Anne Washburn. Doors open at 7 p.m.

'10 Out of 12" is a detailed, realistic show depicting an all-night technical rehearsal at a small, unnamed downtown theater. It is based on notes that Washburn took during her tech rehearsals through the years.

The staged reading is directed by UW-River Falls Stage and Screen Arts alum Devon Sundt. The event's audience gets a behind-the-scenes view of a production company creating a new play in real time. "10 Out of 12" is not a fully staged production.

The cast includes UW-River Falls students Katrina Hunton of Plum City; Parker Miellce of Ramsey, Minn.; Isabella Petersen of New Prague, Minn.; Klara Fansler of Osceola; Max Heinz of Buffalo City; Karyn Wood of Spring Valley; Saga Jakupacak of Hudson; and Katie Cink of Cleveland, Minn.

Call the Box Office at 715-425-3114 for more information.



Helen Rada, a second-grade teacher at Putnam Heights Elementary School in Eau Claire, holds her award certificate as she celebrates winning the Golden Apple Award with her students during a celebration announcing the award on Feb. 6. Photo courtesy of Helen Rada.

UWRF grad recognized for her teaching excellence Rada receives award given in Eau Claire Area School District

February 19, 2024 – Helen Rada, a University of Wisconsin-River Falls graduate now teaching second grade at Putnam Heights Elementary School in Eau Claire, has been recognized for her educator expertise despite being only two years into her professional career.

Rada, who graduated from UW-River Falls with an elementary education degree in Dec. 2021, recently received the Golden Apple Award bestowed to 20 Eau Claire Area School District teachers annually. Rada received the award – given by the Eau Claire Public Schools Foundation, WEAU TV-13 and local businesses – on Feb. 6.

Rada said she was “very surprised” and honored to receive the award which was announced at an all-school assembly. Award winners are nominated by their peers.

“I had no idea what was happening,” Rada, 24, said of receiving the award. “At first, I was kind of confused about what was

going on. Then I realized I was receiving this award, and it felt amazing.”

Rada saw a large poster at the assembly congratulating her for receiving the Golden Apple Award. Then school officials announced the honor, and Rada’s second graders and the school’s other students applauded and celebrated.

“Being recognized by my colleagues, it feels really good,” Rada said. “It was really important to get this. It feels really positive, and it had my class really excited.”

Joel Donna, a professor of teacher education at UW-River Falls, said Rada is a credit to the Teacher Education Department that has been preparing educators for the past 149 years.

“The elementary education faculty are so very proud of the work Helen is doing in building meaningful relationships with her students and her community to help make our world a better place,” Donna said.

Rada said she tries to get to know her students and discover what they are interested in, then relate that to what they are learning in the classroom. Her peers credit Rada for her dedication to her students and for supporting her teacher and staff colleagues.

Rada grew up in Chippewa Falls and graduated from McDonell Central Catholic High School in 2017. While in high school, she volunteered in an elementary school classroom and worked at the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Greater Chippewa Valley-Chippewa Falls Center for five summers.

“I was involved in educational settings with children a lot,” Rada said, “and I think that set me up for being a teacher, for being in an environment where there is always learning going on.”

Rada’s time at UW-River Falls as an education major furthered her wanting to work as an educator. She praised the instruction she received from the university’s faculty, saying it prepared her well for working as a teacher professionally.

“My experiences at UW-River Falls were exactly what I needed to work effectively with children in the classroom,” she said.

Receiving the Golden Apple has meaning to her beyond the award, Rada said.

“It’s really a reminder of the importance of the job I’m doing, how I have this opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of my students,” she said. “I want to make the most of that.”



Celebrated musician Jin Hi Kim will perform her innovative Korean music during a performance at UW-River Falls March 14 for the university's 58th Commissioned Composer Concert. Kim is known as a musical pioneer for her work with the komungo, a traditional Korean stringed instrument that dates to the fourth century. Contributed photo.

UW-River Falls hosts 58th Commissioned Composer Concert March 14

Event to feature Korean musician celebrated for her innovative works

River Falls, Wis. – Renowned composer Jin Hi Kim will showcase her innovative Korean musicianship during a performance at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls for the university's 58th Commissioned Composer Concert.

Kim will perform at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 14, in Abbott Concert Hall in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building, 420 E. Cascade Ave., River Falls. The concert is free and open to the public.

As part of the Commissioned Composer series, Kim will be on campus for a residency March 12-14. She will discuss her new

composition, "Vocalization in Motion," during an assembly at 11 a.m. March 14, in 129 Kleinpell Fine Arts.

Kim is known as a musical pioneer for her work with the komungo, a traditional Korean stringed instrument that dates to ancient times. She has introduced the instrument into the American contemporary music scene and has gained acclaim for her solo performances on the world's only electric komungo. Her performances can involve interactive computer programs, part of her large-scale multimedia shows.

Kim is a Guggenheim Fellow composer, a U.S. Artist Fellow and has performed around the world and at such notable locations as Carnegie Hall, the Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her musical works have been commissioned by notable performers around the world.

She has received positive performance reviews from such outlets as The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times and other publications. Kim received the New England Foundation for the Arts Rebecca Blunk Fund Award to create her work titled "A Ritual for Covid-19" in memory of people who died around the world during the pandemic.

UW-River Falls Professor Emeritus Conrad De Jong began the Commissioned Composer Project in 1967, making it the longest-standing program of its kind in the U.S and shining a national spotlight on the UW-River Falls Music Department.

Each year since, UW-River Falls commissions a composer to write a piece of music for the student body. The composer also makes a campus visit to interact with the students and take part in the premiere performance of that work.

For more information, email patti.cudd@uwrf.edu or call the UW-River Falls Music Department at 715-425-3183.



Wisconsin Secretary of State Sarah Godlewski, left, and River Falls Community Services Director/City Clerk Amy White talk with UW-River Falls students Tuesday about jobs in local and state government and opportunities for young people to get involved. Students attending the discussion asked Godlewski and White questions about government jobs and how they can link to them. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls hosts discussion about importance, role of government jobs

Secretary of State, River Falls clerk talk with students about opportunities

River Falls, Wis. – Growing up in Eau Claire, Sarah Godlewski never envisioned that she would one day work in government, but she's doing her part to ensure that young Wisconsinites see doing so as a viable job opportunity that helps society.

Godlewski, appointed Wisconsin's secretary of state in March 2023 and state treasurer from 2019-23, joined River Falls Community Services Director/City Clerk Amy White Tuesday at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls to talk with students about jobs in local and state government and the important roles such positions play in a democracy.

After high school, Godlewski graduated from college with a peace and conflict resolution degree and planned to work in humanitarian aid. Instead, she wound up working for the federal government at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., supporting military troops and families. She subsequently moved back to Wisconsin to be closer to family. In 2018, she decided to run in the election for state treasurer and won.

“When I was your age, I didn’t have any idea about government jobs,” Godlewski told students. “I didn’t know what they were, what the people who had those jobs did. If somebody would have told me that one day I would work in government and would be Wisconsin’s secretary of state, I would have told them they were nuts.”

However, after working in those jobs, Godlewski has an appreciation for the important role government at all levels plays in citizens’ lives. Important decisions that impact people ranging from ensuring clean drinking water, to fire and police services, to how tax dollars are spent are made by government officials.

White is among government workers helping make sure her community operates smoothly and provides needed services for residents. Like Godlewski, White didn’t know much about government jobs as a young adult. She started her career as an attorney and worked in criminal prosecution before getting a degree in public administration and seeking a job in local government, then getting hired in River Falls.

“I didn’t realize that there was a position like this that could be available to me,” White said of a job in local government. “I just wasn’t familiar with that when I was younger. Then I realized that this was a way to impact so many people’s lives on the local level, and I realized it was something that I wanted to do.”

White and Godlewski told students about the many ways government impacts people and discussed specific job functions. They encouraged students to reach out to government employees to learn more about positions and to make connections.

“A lot of times the best way to learn is just to have a conversation with someone who does that job,” Godlewski said.

Students asked Godlewski and White numerous questions about government jobs and how they can link to opportunities to be involved. Godlewski said her office is working to design a paid internship program that links young people to jobs working with state and local government officials.

Evelyn Wiltrout, a sophomore political science major from Cambridge, Minn., said the discussion with Godlewski and White helped her better understand the importance of government jobs and opportunities in that sector. Wiltrout, who has diabetes, previously advocated for capping the price of insulin – which is used to treat diabetes – in Minnesota. She plans to one day work professionally developing public policy and advocating for causes.

“Hearing today from people who are doing that kind of work, it makes it seem more real that I can do that too,” Wiltrout said.

That is exactly the kind of message Godlewski hopes to spread as she continues to travel across Wisconsin meeting with young people to educate them about government jobs and opportunities. She and her team visited several west-central Wisconsin communities Monday and Tuesday to meet with young people to discuss government.

“There are a lot of opportunities for young people in local and state government right now,” Godlewski said, “and I want them to know about it. Wisconsin will be a better place through their involvement.”

Wes Chapin named interim provost

Provost David Travis named next president of Lake Superior State University



February 22, 2024 - UW-River Falls has appointed longtime faculty member and administrator Wes Chapin as interim provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs.

Chapin will begin in that position March 11. He will fill the position being vacated by current Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs David Travis, who has been named the next president of Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. Travis will start in that position this summer.

Chapin, of Woodville, has a long history at UW-River Falls. He is an alum and worked as a faculty member in political science and international studies before becoming an administrator. He has been active in shared governance, including serving three times as Faculty Senate chair and serving on numerous committees. He also has been in a leadership role in three strategic planning efforts.

Since 2013, Chapin has worked as associate vice chancellor for academic affairs and graduate studies. In that position, he has been the lead academic administrator responsible for program audit and review, learning assessment, institutional accreditation and administrative support for faculty and staff development. He also has served as dean of graduate studies, director of institutional research, director of international education, coordinator for learning effectiveness, and as the university's accreditation liaison officer.

In addition, the Grants and Research Office, the Undergraduate Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activity (URSCA) Office, the McNair Program, Outreach and Continuing Education, the Honors program, and the Falcon Scholars program, among other programs, have reported to him. Chapin said he is honored to serve in his new role.

"As a first-generation student, I know firsthand how UW-River Falls changes lives and opens doors to new opportunities. I am looking forward to working with faculty, staff, students, and community members," he said.

Chapin's history at UW-River Falls and his work in many parts of the university make him a strong fit for the interim provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs position, Chancellor Maria Gallo said.

"Dr. Chapin's longstanding commitment to our mission and pursuit of our strategic plan goals, combined with his skills in accreditation, program review and planning, plus learning assessment, will be great assets to our leadership team and the university," Gallo said.



Travis has been provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at UW-River Falls since June 2018, helping to lead the development of numerous programs, including the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, nearly a dozen academic programs, and the launch of a First Year Experience Program beginning in fall 2024.



Prior to UW-River Falls, Travis began his academic career at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in 1994 as an assistant professor of geography and rose through the ranks to become dean of the College of Letters and Sciences.

Travis said he is proud of his work at UW-River Falls on numerous issues and is excited about his new opportunity at Lake Superior State University. He credited faculty, staff and students at UW-River Falls for working closely together to overcome challenges during his tenure.

“It has been an honor to serve as the provost and vice chancellor at UW-River Falls for nearly six years,” Travis said. “The dedication of the faculty and staff to our students has left me in awe at times and it has been a true privilege to work with these amazing people. We have accomplished a lot during my time here and I’m proud of how the campus has come together to make these changes happen, including helping each other through difficult times.”

Gallo credited Travis for his dedicated work during his time at UW-River Falls.

“On behalf of the entire university, I extend my thanks to Dr. David Travis for his years of service and wish him all the best in his new leadership role,” Gallo said.



UW-River Falls student August Baumann listens to advice from Amanda Berndt, one of the judges of the Innovation Challenge event at UW-River Falls, on Wednesday. Baumann placed second in the event for the business plan he presented for the used vehicle parts company, A.F. Baumann Auto Parts, that he started in 2021. UWRF/Pat Deninger photo.

UW-River Falls students display business acumen at Innovation Challenge

Event includes students receiving assistance from judges, mentors

River Falls, Wis. – Shortly after August Baumann bought his first car, a ramshackle Ford Focus, the vehicle suffered a breakdown. Repairing the car would cost more than it was worth, so Baumann decided to sell it for parts.

Baumann, a student at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, had paid only \$200 for the car, but he was able to sell its usable parts for \$800. With that revelation, a business idea was born.

“I realized there is a market for used auto parts, and I realized that I could make money selling them while also filling a need by providing quality parts that are cheaper than new ones,” Baumann said.

In 2021, Baumann, a sophomore finance major from Cologne, Minn., started his own used auto parts business, A.F. Baumann Auto Parts, based in his hometown. On Wednesday he was one of six UW-River Falls student groups who presented ideas for businesses to a team of judges from industry at the Innovation Challenge event on campus.

Participating students described their ideas for a potential business – or in some cases, for businesses that are already up and running – to a team of business owners and experts. Following 10-minute presentations, judges asked students questions about their business plans. Students worked with a faculty mentor in developing their presentation.

Judges scored the event, and results were tabulated. Awards of \$2,000 for first place, \$1,000 for second place and \$500 for third place were given, with the winner advancing to the WiSys Big Idea Tournament in April. The UW-River Falls Innovation Challenge was sponsored by WiSys, Greater Good Greens and U.S. Bank.

Michelle Stangler, a senior from Watertown double majoring in journalism and agricultural marketing communications, won the first-place award for her Positivity in Ag podcast. Stangler participated on screen from Florence, Italy, where she 's participating in UWRF's Semester Abroad Europe program. Baumann won second place, and third place went to Jake's Window Cleaning, owned and operated by Jake Regan, a sophomore management major from Rogers, Minn.

Other students participating in the event include Guma Jackson, a senior finance major from St. Paul, Minn.; Logan Rowe, a senior finance major from Forest Lake, Minn.; Spencer Burden, a sophomore marketing major from Sleepy Eye, Minn.; Tony Scarpone, a sophomore stage and screen arts major from Wyoming, Minn.; and Luke Heggstad, a junior marketing major from Andover, Minn.

During their presentations Wednesday, students discussed various aspects of their business plans, such as projected costs and revenue, how their business ideas originated, why they believe their business ideas can succeed, and how they plan to grow their businesses. They described results of customer discovery surveys they conducted, feedback they used to alter their business plans.

Students also described challenges they have faced, and how in many instances, those challenges prompted them to pivot from their original plans. For instance, Rowe partnered with Burden, Scarpone and a student from another college to form RoweBoat Solutions, which would provide digital training to companies seeking to reduce their employee training costs.

After conducting market research and surveying prospective business clients, they realized they would have to increase the amount of money they would charge for training videos to cover their costs.

"As you work through the business setup process, you realize that you are going to have to make adjustments like that," Rowe said.

Those are exactly the kinds of lessons that Innovation Challenge participants learn by being part of the event, said Sheri Marnell, director of the St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center and the organizer of the Innovation Challenge.

"The kinds of challenges these students are learning about, the kinds of changes and research you need to do to see if your business idea is viable, those are exactly the kinds of decisions that business owners are making all the time," Marnell said following Wednesday's event.

After students made their presentations, they met with judges to further discuss their business ideas. Judges said they were impressed with students' business plans and acumen. Sarah Kowal, a 2000 UW-River Falls grad, owns Project Biz Lab through which she provides training to business owners. She has judged the Innovation Challenge in the past and praised students' business ideas and dedication.

“As a fellow entrepreneur, it is heartening to see these students’ business ideas and how hard they are working to make their businesses a reality,” Kowal said. “I want to do what I can to support them.”

Student participants said the Innovation Challenge process helped them better think through their business plans and see challenges they wouldn’t have otherwise noticed. The feedback of judges is especially helpful, they said, as is the support of Marnell and other mentors as they develop their businesses.

Stangler praised the mentorship she received, saying it prompted her to think about her business and its potential in new ways. Research she conducted as part of the Innovation Challenge process led her to add a greater social media emphasis to her podcast business.

“While this is a competition, what I wanted most from this is someone to bounce ideas off of and to keep me accountable,” Stangler said. “That’s what I love most about it.”



UW-River Falls student Guma Jackson describes his business plan for Koja’s Café during the Innovation Challenge event at UW-River Falls on Wednesday. As part of the Innovation Challenge, students work to develop business plans with mentors and receive feedback from judges as they present their plans to a team of industry judges. UWRF/Pat Deninger photo.

UW-River Falls to host Black History Month speaker Feb. 21

Presentation to focus on recognizing, questioning our biases

River Falls, Wis. – A nationally recognized speaker who aims to help people better understand their biases as they relate to diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) and belonging will discuss that topic at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls on Wednesday, Feb. 21, as part of Black History Month.

Dr. Sandra Ogunremi, vice president of diversity, inclusion and belonging at Monument Health Rapid City Hospital in Rapid City, S.D., will discuss DEI and the impact of people's biases on their decisions during her presentation "Adjust Your Lens to See Things Differently."

The event, sponsored by the UW-River Falls Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (DIB) Office, is from 4-5:30 p.m. in the Kinnickinnic Theater on the third floor of the University Center, 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls.

Ogunremi has worked since 2008 at Monument Health, where she has worked on incorporating DEI into the healthcare provider's processes. Thanks to her work, last year Monument Health Rapid City Hospital was recognized as one of three healthcare systems to earn the Carolyn Boone Lewis Equity of Care Award.

Princess Kent, DIB director, said recognizing the biases we carry and their impact on our decisions is always important, especially during Black History Month.

"While it's crucial to acknowledge biases whenever they arise, the celebration of Black History Month underscores the heightened importance of recognizing and challenging our biases, particularly in the context of the diversity challenges faced by our university," Kent said.



UW-River Falls student Brandi Weiland and others have restarted a university chapter of Active Minds as part of efforts to address student mental health on campus. On Monday Weiland, wearing a pink sweatshirt, spoke with students visiting the Active Minds booth, an effort to connect with students and make them feel less alone. UWRF/Julian Emerson photo.

Active Minds, Mental Health Mondays addressing mental health needs at UW-River Falls

Efforts intended to serve as safe, positive connection points for students

March 7, 2024 – Two years ago, as one aspect after another of her life unraveled, Brandi Weiland felt like she hit rock bottom.

Her brother died in 2020, and that incident seemed to set Weiland's mood on a downward spiral. The University of Wisconsin-River Falls senior double majoring in elementary education and stage and screen arts said her mental health difficulties snowballed and her spirit sagged.

"My mental health was really bad," she said, "and it kept getting worse. I was suicidal."

Then, amid her struggles, one day a fellow student reassured Weiland, of Hawkins, that it would be OK, that she was a worthy person. That unexpected interaction not only lifted Weiland emotionally but may have saved her life, she said.

Now Weiland and other UW-River Falls students hope to give their peers a much-needed emotional boost. Weiland, president of the UW-River Falls Active Minds chapter, and others have revived Active Minds, a student-to-student effort

intended to promote mental health through direct interactions with their peers.

Active Minds includes a variety of student-led mental health efforts on campuses across the U.S. It existed previously at UW-River Falls but had been discontinued.

The chapter at UW-River Falls was recently reinstated as an official student organization after students expressed an interest in restarting it as a means of helping their peers' mental health in the wake of four student suicides at the university last semester. The chapter is run by students and is advised by Annemarie Schwery, a counselor at UW-River Falls who has experience working with student organizations.

Schwery said Active Minds members are brainstorming ideas for different events and bringing speakers to campus to focus on mental health needs. They aim to create a space for students to connect with each other, to simply have positive interactions with the aim of easing mental health concerns.

"It is all about the students creating a community in which they feel safe discussing mental health and knowing when to seek professional assistance," Schwery said.

On Monday Active Minds was a part of Mental Health Mondays, a monthly event organized by Student Health and Counseling Services and the Student Involvement Office focused on selfcare, wellness and promoting positive student interactions as a means of easing students' mental health concerns. Attendees received free prizes, food, created their own essential oil mixes and visited the Active Minds booth.

Weiland, Active Minds president, spoke with students as they stopped by the booth. She and her peers discussed classwork and life events. She showed students colorful journals in which students can document their dreams.

"Having conversations like what is happening tonight, it makes me feel like this is helping other students, like this is serving a meaningful purpose," Weiland said during a short break between conversations. "I hope this continues after I graduate and continues to help more students."

Organizers of Mental Health Mondays have the same hope. Started in 2019, Mental Health Mondays used to take place in more of a traditional classroom manner, but those events typically attracted no more than 25 students, said Elise Peters, events and activities coordinator for the Student Involvement Office.

So last year organizers "took the event to students," Peters said, bringing it to the Student Involvement area on the University Center's first floor. Since then, the number of students attending Mental Health Mondays has grown significantly, she said. On Monday, 85 students took part.

The new approach offers less in-depth services than previously, she said, but that is offset by reaching a greater number of students. A softer, less-formal format that entices students with free prizes and food seems to appeal to more of them when it comes to mental health, she said, and can serve as a gateway to deeper discussions and additional help for students who need it.

"The way we are doing this now meets a need for a greater number of students," Peters said. "We're trying to reach as many students as we can, to do what we can to help their mental health status. We're seeing that providing a space where students are simply connecting with one another is powerful."

McKenna Delany, a senior communications major from Luck, was doing her best to connect with students attending Monday's event, where she was one of numerous students representing the Student Involvement Office. Sitting at a table where students checked in for Mental Health Mondays, she greeted students and directed them to the Active Minds booth, an essential oils station, and a location for free food after they spun a wheel modeled after the popular TV game show "Wheel of Fortune." The theme of this month's Mental Health Mondays was the importance of sleep and relaxation.

"Did you spin the wheel? What did you get?" Delany asked one student. A moment later, she told two students who had just spun the wheel that they could choose from a dozen or so colored sleep masks on the table in front of her, one of multiple prize types students could choose from.

"It's Mental Health Monday! It's about sleep, and you all could use some more sleep," Delany told them.

Such interactions are what Mental Health Mondays, and efforts like Active Minds, are all about, Delany said. They serve to connect students, to let them know they aren't alone and isolated, she said.

"I hear from people who interact and they say they realize 'Oh, this feels a lot better than when I am by myself all the time,'" Delany said. "We're not going to solve the root of a problem at an event like this. But we can help students feel more involved and serve as a space where they can interact with their peers in a positive setting."

Peters agrees that Mental Health Mondays, Active Minds and other mental health initiatives are serving to connect students and are especially needed in the wake of the student deaths last semester.

"Events like this may not change the world, but they can serve as a conversation starter," Peters said. "It's about the shared experience of being a UWRF student, about students connecting with each other. Given the mental health needs we're seeing today, I don't see this going away anytime soon."



Participants at last year's Ag Day on Campus at UW-River Falls learned about various aspects of agriculture at one of more than 20 information booths that were part of the event. This year's Ag Day on Campus is April 11.

Please join us for the 2024 Ag Day on Campus April 11 as we celebrate the legacy and future of agriculture through our theme "Growing for Generations!"

- The opening ceremony will begin at **9:30 a.m.**, with many Wisconsin and Minnesota agriculture royalty and special guests present along with some of our very own UWRF VIPs!
- After we kick off #AgDay24, join in the fun and participate in activities on the University Center Mall hosted by various College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences student organizations from **10:30 a.m. until 2 p.m.**
- A free dinner will be provided at **5 p.m.** outside 200 Ag Science.
- Finally, we will end the night with an agricultural speaker panel in the Riverview Ballroom in the University Center from **7-9 p.m.**

Freddy's Dairy Bar (212 Ag Science, next to CAFES Dean's Office) will be open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Thursday, April 11, for Ag Day on Campus. Stop by to pick up some cheese curds made in the newly renovated Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence – plain, dill and chipotle flavors available. There will also be ice cream for sale – not Freddy's ice cream just yet, but that will be coming soon.

Ag Day on Campus at UW-River Falls helps connect food to

farming

April 11 event will include animal petting zoo, agriculture seminar, local food and even a mechanical bull

March 29, 2024 – Agriculture is closely interwoven in the history of both the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and the state of Wisconsin, and organizers of this year's annual Ag Day on Campus hope to connect with event attendees to focus on farming's future as well.

The event, which focuses on the important roles that agriculture plays in people's lives, runs from 9:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Thursday, April 11, in the area in front of the University Center, E. 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls. In case of inclement weather, the event will be moved inside the University Center.

This year's theme, "growing for generations," symbolizes the longtime, pivotal role that agriculture has played in Wisconsin and how it continues to have a significant impact even as farming undergoes changes, said student organizers Aleah Cole and Lashawna Vogel.

"It's about the generational aspect of agriculture, how that has been so important and has developed through the years, and how agriculture really connects us all," said Cole, a senior animal science major from Sartell, Minn.

Ag Day on Campus was started at UW-River Falls in 2012 by the university's Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter. The event will include a display of tractors – a symbol of agriculture – along with another ag icon, Colleen the Dream, a large fiberglass Holstein cow.

Many booths staffed by agriculture industry workers and representatives of student agriculture clubs will be at Ag Day, which will also be attended by Princess Kay of the Milky Way, UW-River Falls student Emma Kubal as well as the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fair, a position currently held by Kelsey Henderson.

A favorite activity is attendees being able to view and pet farm animals.

"That is always a big draw," Cole said. "People love to see and pet the animals."

Adding to the fun, attendees can test their skill riding a mechanical bull.

"That is something we hope will add some fun to this event," said Vogel, a junior agriculture marketing communications major from Denmark.

As part of the event, a panel of agriculture experts will discuss trends in modern agriculture and skills the ag industry is looking for in its employees. A free dinner featuring foods grown locally will be served at 5 p.m. in Room 200 of the Agricultural Science building on campus.

Food – specifically where food comes from – is a focus of the event. With so many people not living on farms, they often don't make connections between food and farms, Vogel said.

"So many people are three generations removed from a farm," she said. "They go to the grocery store to buy food, but they

often don't think about where their food really comes from and all that is necessary to get that food to the store."

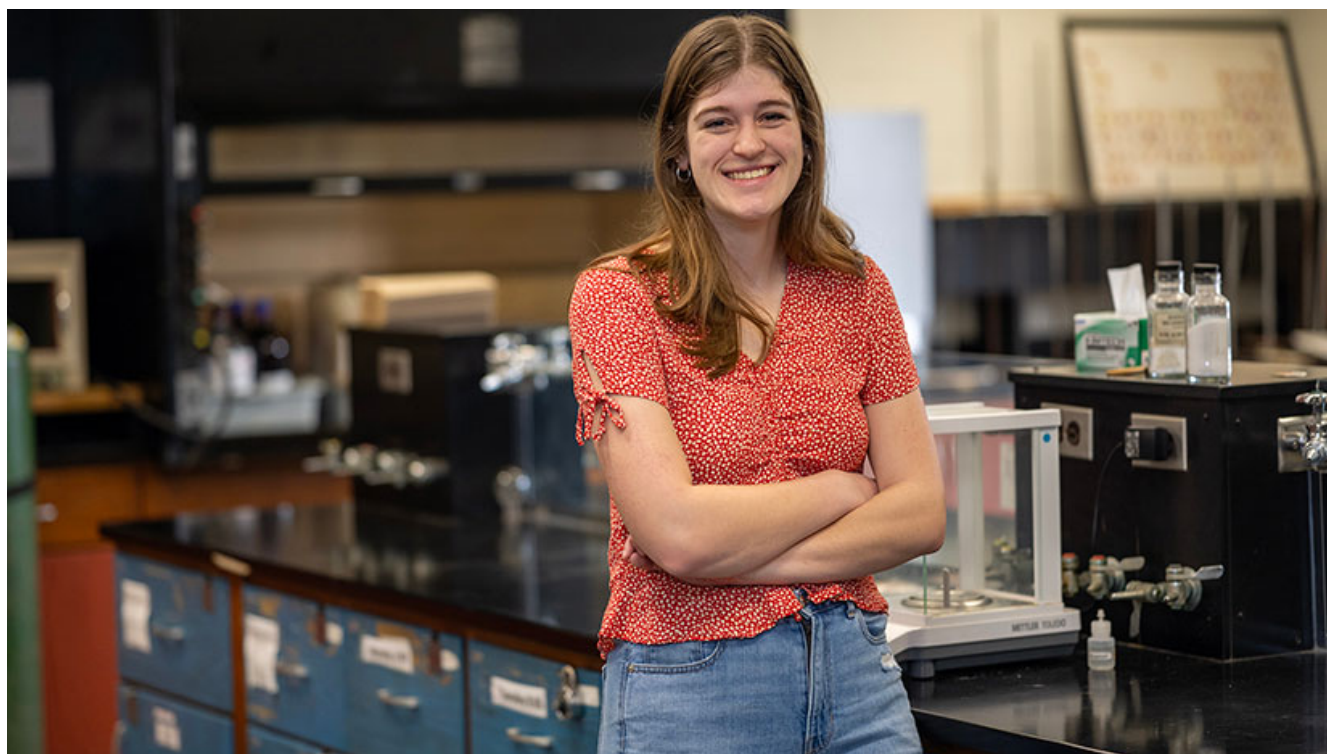
Cole and Vogel said Ag Day on Campus takes months of planning and is only possible because of the help of so many students. Between 50-60 students took part in planning this year's event. Mike Orth, dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES), echoed that sentiment.

"The participation of our CAFES students in Ag Day events demonstrates students' commitment to agriculture and helping others realize its critical role in the health and well-being of our society," he said.

Vogel's immediate family didn't farm, but her grandparents did, and she has fond memories of spending time on their farm as a child. In high school she joined the National FFA Organization, formerly Future Farmers of America, which led her to study agriculture marketing communications. Cole didn't grow up on a farm, but when she arrived at UW-River Falls and was exposed to agriculture, she was hooked. She recently was accepted into veterinary school.

"Even if you aren't raised on a farm, you can get involved with agriculture and the ag industry," she said. "You can learn an appreciation for agriculture and make connections with how important it is in our society."

For more information about the event, email cfb@uwrf.edu.



UW-River Falls student Hailey Beilke has developed an affinity for conducting research and is studying how PFAS infiltrate human cells. Beilke has been named this year's recipient of the Drs. Ann and William Lydecker Student Research Award that recognizes an outstanding undergraduate's research efforts combined with service to and/or involvement in UW-River Falls.

Beilke receives 2024 Lydecker student research award

Varied classroom experiences led to affinity for research

March 12, 2024 – When Hailey Beilke arrived at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls for her freshman year, chemistry wasn't in her plans.

Beilke initially planned to study occupational therapy and chose the exercise and sports management track for that program. She subsequently switched to biomedical sciences before finally settling on chemistry during her sophomore year.

While her collegiate academic path has involved twists and turns, it has worked extremely well for Beilke. She has been named the recipient of the 2024 Drs. Ann and William Lydecker Student Research Award. The award, given annually since 2011, recognizes an outstanding undergraduate's research efforts combined with service to and/or involvement in UW-River Falls. Ann Lydecker was chancellor at UW-River Falls from 2000-04 before she died in a vehicle crash. She was the university's first woman chancellor.

"There is so much amazing undergraduate research that happens here," said Beilke, a junior from Big Lake, Minn. "For me to be chosen for this, it is really amazing and makes me feel proud of my work."

Despite her having changed majors before deciding on chemistry, her studies at UW-River Falls have a common thread,

Beilke said.

"I've had a lot of changes in my studies at UWRF," she said, "but I knew as soon as I enrolled that I wanted to get involved in research. No matter what I was studying, I was doing research."

Beilke's current research project involves determining how PFAS – chemicals used in nonstick substances and thought to be harmful to human health – find their way into human cells. The work involves a complicated three-phase electrode system that mimics human cells and lots of math, Beilke said. On March 6, she presented her research on that project at the Research in the Rotunda event at the state Capitol in Madison.

She and her faculty mentor on the project, Blair Troudt, chemistry and biotechnology assistant professor, have worked for months to set up the electrochemistry part of the project. They are now beginning the testing process, work that Beilke said she is "very excited about."

"It's amazing as an undergraduate student to be doing this type of research in something that is so relevant to our society," Beilke said. "I never expected that I would be doing this at this age."

Troudt said Beilke is especially deserving of high-level research opportunities. Beilke is highly motivated, persistent, and well prepared, Troudt said. She also is willing to alter her research when that is called for, such as not only measuring PFAS in human cells but studying whether pencil lead can be used as an electrode as part of that project, Troudt said.

"She is always willing to learn new things and is flexible enough to really make any project her own and she doesn't give up until we have answers," Troudt said of Beilke.

Molly Gerrish, director of Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity at UW-River Falls, offered similar praise of Beilke. In her role as president of Student Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity and through presenting her research at numerous events, Beilke exhibits not only extraordinary research skills but strong leadership, Gerrish said.

"(Beilke) is the type of student who helps others realize their potential and understands the importance of engaging in high level research and scholarly efforts," Gerrish said. "She is a strong advocate for UWRF and always represents herself and UWRF with the utmost respect and professionalism."

Beilke said she first became interested in science after taking an honors biology course in 10th grade. Still, she didn't plan to pursue a chemistry career. Now she's so glad that she's doing just that. After graduating from UWRF, Beilke plans to pursue a doctorate in chemistry and become a researcher.

"There is so much chemistry that I want to explore," she said. "No matter what job I wind up with, I will be happy to be doing research. It's what I love to do."

Food choices topic of Moosa Speaker Series event at UW-River Falls on April 4

Guest philosophy professor to discuss ethical decisions about what we eat

River Falls, Wis. – Humans are complex organisms, but each person has the ability to make ethical choices about what they eat, according to the featured speaker at this year's [Dr. Imtiaz Moosa Philosophy and Ethics Speaker Series](#) at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.



[Lisa Heldke](#), philosophy professor and director of [The Nobel Conference](#) at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn., will discuss how and why people make choices about what they eat as part of her presentation “Stuck on You: Ethics in the Age of Parasitism” at 4 p.m. Thursday, April 4, in the Kinnickinnic Theater in the University Center, E. 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls. A reception before Heldke’s talk begins at 3:30 p.m.

Heldke’s address includes a Q&A session. The event is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

Heldke said she views humans as communities of organisms who can make choices about their next meal. She plans to pose questions about how to make ethical decisions about what foods we consume and how we “take moral responsibility for dinner.”

She teaches a variety of courses, ranging from modern philosophy to studying cooking and eating. She has authored numerous works on those topics including “Philosophers at Table: On Food and Being Human,” “Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer,” and “The Encyclopedia of Food and Agriculture Ethics.”

Heldke is also co-creator of [The John Dewey Kitchen Institute](#) that invites educators to use cooking and eating as a means of classroom teaching.

The speaker series was established in 2021 in tribute to former UWRF Philosophy Professor Imtiaz Moosa who taught at the university from 1989 until his unexpected death in December 2020. The series features leading experts and thought leaders with expertise in a variety of important philosophical, social justice and contemporary ethics-related issues. It is intended to discuss society’s most pressing issues, and the fragile nature of democracy itself.

Moosa was a much-respected and beloved faculty member at UWRF. He was known for his love for and dedication to his students and for his vibrant personality. Moosa was born in Africa and moved to Canada when he was 16. He was diagnosed with a degenerative eye disease and lost his eyesight in 2006. For more about Moosa, visit [here](#).

The series fund provides financial resources for an annual speaker. Donations to the speaker series can be made [here](#).



The Dr. Imtiaz Moosa Philosophy and Ethics Speaker Series at UW-River Falls was established in 2021 in memory of Moosa, a much-respected longtime philosophy professor who died in December 2020. This year's annual event is on April 4 and features keynote presenter Lisa Heldke, a philosophy professor at Gustavus Adolphus College. UWRF photo.



On Wednesday, Gov. Tony Evers signed into a law a change in Wisconsin-Minnesota tuition reciprocity regulations that will provide additional revenue for UW-River Falls and other Universities of Wisconsin schools. UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo, in red directly behind Evers, attended the bill signing ceremony and has strongly backed the funding change. UWRF photo.

Gov. Evers signs into law tuition reciprocity change that will benefit UW-River Falls

Gov. Evers signs into law tuition reciprocity change that will benefit UW-River Falls

March 6, 2024 – University of Wisconsin-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo joined others Wednesday at the state Capitol in Madison as Gov. Tony Evers signed into law a change in Wisconsin-Minnesota tuition reciprocity regulations that will provide additional revenue for UW-River Falls and other Universities of Wisconsin schools.

The tuition reciprocity bill approved last month by the Assembly and Senate will allow UW-River Falls and other Wisconsin public universities to retain the full share of tuition revenue that Minnesota students pay to attend Wisconsin schools. That amount is higher than what Wisconsin students pay.

Without tuition reciprocity funding, UW-River Falls is losing between \$3 million and \$4 million per year in revenue, Gallo said.

“That is revenue that could have been reinvested in UWRF, meeting student demands and filling regional employer needs,” Gallo said. “That revenue would allow us to offer more innovative, high-quality programming for our students, add advisers

and support student success, including as it relates to mental health.”

Previously, the additional funding paid by Minnesota students went to the general fund of the state budget. Allowing universities to retain those dollars will provide UW-River Falls with much-needed additional money, Gallo said. Nearly half of UW-River Falls students are from Minnesota, the highest percentage among Universities of Wisconsin schools.

The added revenue made possible by the new tuition reciprocity agreement will also allow UW-River Falls to increase hands-on educational opportunities in partnership with local employers, bringing additional innovation and business collaboration to the region, Gallo said. Such agreements could be especially important as construction continues on the university’s Science and Technology Innovation Center scheduled to open in January 2026.

“As employers in our region look to us to help them fill their workforce and talent needs, UW-River Falls is uniquely poised to be a part of the solution, with our access to the large and diverse student market in the Twin Cities,” she said. “This new agreement allows us to fully capitalize on and reinvest the revenue we raise through tuition reciprocity.”

Gallo is among UW-River Falls officials and students who have advocated for changes to the state’s tuition reciprocity rules in recent years. She thanked Evers for signing the bill and praised state lawmakers who represent River Falls – Rep. Shannon Zimmerman, Rep. Warren Petryk, Sen. Jeff Smith and Sen. Rob Stafsholt – for supporting the tuition reciprocity bill. Stafsholt was lead author of the Senate bill, and Zimmerman was lead of the Assembly bill.

Stage and Screen Productions to present 'Urinetown, The Musical' April 3-7

March 21, 2024 – Stage and Screen Productions at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls will present “Urinetown, the Musical” April 3-7.

The production, with music by Mark Hollmann, lyrics by Hollmann and Greg Kotis, and book by Kotis, is April 3-6 at 7:30 p.m. and at 2 p.m. on April 7 in the Blanche Davis Theatre in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building, 420 E. Cascade Ave., River Falls.

“Urinetown, the Musical” is a humorous satire about a town beleaguered by drought, greed, and corruption. When water becomes so scarce that citizens are forced to pay outrageous fees to use the bathrooms, revolution erupts. The show is funny, timely, and filled with engaging characters and music.

The production is directed by Stage and Screen Arts Lecturer Kathy Welch, with musical direction by Cera Babb and Casey Palbicki of the university's Music Department.

Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors 60 and up, and \$5 for UWRF students and kids under 18. Tickets may be purchased online at <https://marketplace.uwrf.edu/collections/theatre-productions-2023-24>, or in person at the Box Office in the lobby. The Box Office will be open weekdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. beginning March 27 and one hour prior to performance times. Call the Box Office at 715-425-3114 for more information.

Urinetown is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI). All authorized performance materials are also supplied by MTI.

Students at UW-River Falls offering Wellness Fair April 3

March 29, 2024 – Health and Human Performance students at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls are hosting a free Wellness Fair designed to promote holistic well-being and provide valuable resources to support one's health and wellness journey.

The Wellness Fair is set for Wednesday, April 3, from 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. in Page Arena in the Falcon Center, 185 Emogene Nelson Ave., River Falls. The fair will have something for everyone: learn about healthy living strategies, discover new wellness practices, or simply enjoy a fun and informative event.

The Wellness Fair will include:

- Interactive Booths: Explore various booths offering information, activities, and resources on physical, mental, and emotional wellness.
- Freebies and Giveaways: Enjoy free samples, goodies, and giveaways from our sponsors and partners.
- Community Connections: Connect with fellow students, campus organizations, and local businesses committed to promoting wellness.
- Fun Activities: Engage in fun activities like fitness challenges, mindfulness exercises, and wellness knowledge competitions.

For more information and to register, visit our website at <https://sites.google.com/view/uwrf-wellness-fair/pre-registration> or email mari.kline@uwrf.edu. Walk-ins welcome.



UW-River Falls students study during a finance class in South Hall, the university's original building on campus that was constructed in 1874. This year's Giving Days fundraiser celebrates the university's 150-year anniversary and the positive difference it continues to make in the St. Croix Valley, Wisconsin and elsewhere. UWRF file photo.

UW-River Falls Giving Days fundraiser to be held in conjunction with 150th anniversary

University has played, will continue to serve vital role in building, supporting the region

March 21, 2024 – As the University of Wisconsin-River Falls prepares to celebrate the 150th anniversary of its founding, officials hope to use that number to boost donations as part of the university's annual Giving Day fundraiser.

In conjunction with the 150-year commemoration, UW-River Falls has set a Giving Day fundraising goal of \$150,000. Last year donations on Giving Day topped \$100,000.

This year, Giving Day will actually be Giving Days as the annual fundraising event will occur on Thursday, April 4 and Friday, April 5, taking place over two days instead of one as it has in the past.

"We hope that the support people have shown this university and how it benefits this region and Wisconsin shows itself in donations on Giving Days," Rick Foy, UWRF assistant chancellor for university advancement, said of the event that is the university's largest single fundraising event each year.

The fundraising effort, with all donations directed to the UWRF Foundation, enhances students' educational experiences by funding research activities, scholarships, faculty and staff development, and more. It also highlights the university's impact on

the economy and quality of life throughout the region and state. In many cases, multiple generations of the same family have attended the university.

"We want to emphasize the generational success of UWRF and how this university has played a vital role for so many people over its 150-year history," Foy said.

In collaboration with Giving Days, UWRF will host an on-campus sesquicentennial commemoration on Monday, April 8, celebrating the fundraising effort along with the founding of the River Falls State Normal School in April 1874. April 8 was the groundbreaking of the original South Hall building that was the first on campus. The official public kickoff to the university's 150-year anniversary celebration will occur at the beginning of the 2024-25 academic year, with commemoration events continuing through May 2025.

UW-River Falls is thankful to its many donors, who are supporting the university at record-breaking pace, Foy said. Private donations have become especially important as public universities have experienced tight budgets in recent years. Dollars raised support projects, scholarships, programs, and other student-focused initiatives. Unrestricted funds not specified for certain programs or projects can be used to fill funding gaps.

"Those unrestricted dollars are critical and help the university meet pressing and immediate needs," Foy said.

Last year's fundraiser focused on the Falcon Annual Fund that provides undesignated money to a wide variety of needs. This year's Giving Days will continue to emphasize the Falcon Annual Fund but will also seek support for the university's three colleges and Falcon Athletics. The university in December hired Scott Sekelsky, who focuses his fundraising efforts on the athletic program.

"We want our donors to give to whatever areas really speak to them," said Lindsey Nelson, UWRF's annual giving manager and coordinator of Giving Days. "As we've evolved, our expectations have risen significantly. Only five years ago, our overall goal was \$15,000. This year it's \$150,000, ten times more than 2019."

No matter which category people want to donate to, all funds are appreciated and will go to good use, Foy said.

"All of the money we take in goes toward supporting UW-River Falls and enables it to provide its students with a quality, affordable education while also playing a vital role in our region, one of the upper Midwest's fastest-growing areas," Foy said.

For Giving Days details, visit <https://fundraising.idonate.com/uwrf/GivingDay2024> or contact Nelson at lindsey.nelson@uwrf.edu or 715-425-4291. All donations are directed to the UWRF Foundation and are tax-deductible.



Military veterans and others celebrate Veterans Day at UW-River Falls on Nov. 9, 2023. The university has once again been named a Military Friendly School in a national survey.

UW-River Falls recognized again as Military Friendly School

March 28, 2024 – The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has once again been named a Military Friendly School for the 2024-25 school year, a recognition of the university's ongoing commitment to providing quality educational opportunities to military members.

UW-River Falls was selected as a silver-level school in the small public institution category for its education support of military veterans for the survey agency Viqtory. More than 1,800 schools took part in the survey, with award winners being selected in gold, silver, and bronze categories.

The repeated high ranking in the survey is evidence of the support UW-River Falls shows its veterans and their families, said Cheryl Grubb, UWRF Veterans Services coordinator. UW-River Falls assists veterans whose military service ranges from active duty, to the National Guard, to GI Bill recipients. It helps them in multiple areas such as financial aid, support services, academic policies and others.

"UW-River Falls is committed to helping military veterans from the moment they begin their studies," Grubb said. "The university has a robust set of departments and services to help all students succeed, including our military community."

The Veteran Services Office serves as not only a location where veterans and their families can find assistance, Grubb said, but as a site where they can spend time with other veterans in a dedicated lounge area. Student veterans say sessions with other veterans helps them in numerous ways, she said, and helps them find a sense of belonging.

In addition, the university recently revived its Veterans Club, adding another way for veterans and their families to receive assistance and find their place at UW-River Falls, Grubb said.

To contact the UWRF Veteran Services Office, call 715-425-3529 or email veterans@uwrf.edu.



Six UW-River Falls students presented their research projects Wednesday at the state Capitol as part of the 20th annual Research in the Rotunda event that showcases undergraduate research by Universities of Wisconsin students. Pictured front row, left to right, are UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo, and students Nhi Nguyen, Lindsey Johnson, Katelyn Marano, and Hailey Beilke. Back row, left of sign is student Chase Syverud. Back row, right of sign are student Jordan Cioni and Molly Gerrish, who oversees UW-River Falls Research in the Rotunda students as director of the university's Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity program. UWRF photo.

Students showcase academic, presentation skills at Research in the Rotunda

Event enables students to build on their research abilities, confidence

March 7, 2024 – In the weeks leading up to the 20th annual Research in the Rotunda event, as she worked on her research studying tiny materials dating to the age of dinosaurs, Katelyn Marano didn't feel apprehensive about presenting her research at the state Capitol in Madison.

But that changed for a moment on Wednesday, when Marano, a University of Wisconsin-River Falls junior geology and earth science major from New Richmond, entered the Capitol and took in her shiny surroundings in the big building where state laws are enacted.

"I wasn't nervous until I stepped foot inside the Capitol," Marano said, "and then I was."

Marano is one of six UW-River Falls students who presented their research to state lawmakers, Universities of Wisconsin officials and others as part of Research in the Rotunda, an annual event at the Capitol intended to highlight high-level

undergraduate research being conducted by students in conjunction with their peer mentors. Other UW-River Falls participants included Hailey Beilke, a senior chemistry major from Big Lake, Minn.; Jordan Cioni, a post-baccalaureate physics major from Green Bay; Lindsey Johnson, a senior communication sciences and disorders major from Hudson; Nhi Nguyen, a senior biomedical and health science major from Hudson; and Chase Syverud, a junior animal science major from Waunakee.

Other students acknowledged they were a bit apprehensive about their presentations initially. But as they set up their posters in the Capitol rotunda and prepared to discuss their research, their worries faded and were replaced by excitement, they said.

"Once I put up my poster, all the nerves went away and I was just so excited to present my findings to everyone at the event," Marano said.

Students said they enjoyed presenting the research they had spent months, and in some cases longer, working on to people interested in hearing about their efforts. They described how they became interested in the topics they researched and the challenges and successes of their work. They praised the faculty who work with them, crediting their learning and improvement conducting research to those teachers.

In addition to talking with visitors to the rotunda about their research, students also visited the offices of lawmakers at the Capitol and discussed their work with members of the state Senate and Assembly and their staff members. Those interactions not only built their confidence as presenters, students said, but led to interesting conversations.

For instance, as she discussed her research with one staff member, Marano learned that staffer had once wanted to be a paleontologist, the career that Marano aspires to.

"Getting to share my research with him and hear his stories about nearly having the same major as me was incredible," Marano said.

Nguyen presented her research studying the motility of breast cancer cells using 2D and 3D imaging. The process has involved lots of trial and error to get images just right so that study of the internal structures of breast cancer cells can occur, she said. She shared those challenges as part of her presentation and described how the research has evolved through difficulties.

In fact, those challenges are exactly what is needed to learn from the research and move ahead successfully, Nguyen said. She said she has experienced personal growth through the research process and from presenting at the state Capitol. She said it was meaningful to be able to describe to one breast cancer survivor the details of her illness and why that woman was on a bone-strengthening treatment.

"I discovered that I have the skills and patience that is needed to be successful in doing research," she said. "This has helped boost my confidence and translated into success in other areas of my life."

Beilke's research involved measuring PFAS – known as "forever chemicals" because they don't break down naturally and are linked to human health problems including cancer – using a three-phase electrode system. Like other students, her research process "has had many ups and downs," she said.

“Failure is required for anything to work,” she said, “and that was a hard lesson to learn.”

Despite challenges, Beilke said her project has proven to be a success, a fact proven during her presentations about her work on Wednesday.

“I started with no knowledge on this topic and now I can confidently talk about my research,” Beilke said, noting she has also learned to troubleshoot when experiments have puzzling results and has grown much more independent doing lab work.

Those are exactly the kinds of lessons that Molly Gerrish, director of Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity (URSCA) at UW-River Falls, said she hopes students learn through the Research in the Rotunda process. Gerrish oversees Research in the Rotunda projects and said she is proud of the student presentations.

The event enables students to make connections with others in their field of study, Gerrish said, to present their work to a high-level professional audience and to discuss their work face to face with state leaders.

“This not only highlights the incredible projects happening at UWRF, but it also allows state leaders to see and hear firsthand how important and impactful undergraduate research is to our students,” Gerrish said.



Participants in the Community Action Poverty Simulation event at UW-River Falls in January 2023 discuss challenges related to trying to pay for living expenses on a limited income. This year's poverty simulation event at the university is scheduled for March 27 and is intended to raise awareness about the growing number of people struggling to pay for basic life expenses. UWRF file photo.

UW-River Falls to host poverty simulation event March 27

Exercise intended to raise awareness, empathy, prompt community action

River Falls, Wis. – Even in the St. Croix Valley, a part of Wisconsin where the population is increasing along with economic development, many people struggle to make ends meet financially.

The number of residents having trouble paying for basic living staples such as housing, food, transportation, and childcare has grown in recent years as costs for many items have outpaced many people's incomes. In fact, many are unable to afford their bills even while working two or more jobs, said Kathleen Hunzer, director of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Honors Program, Chancellor's Scholar and Falcon Scholars programs, and who oversees a campus food pantry for students.

"There is a larger population of people out there who are struggling financially than we know," Hunzer said. "We want to open the community's eyes to that and get them thinking about poverty in their communities."

In recognition of financial difficulties many face, UW-River Falls is hosting the Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS) event from 5:30-9 p.m. on Wednesday, March 27, in the Riverview Ballroom in the University Center, E. 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls. The event is free to attend, but space is limited. Registration is required and must be done by clicking on the "Register Here" button [at this site](#).

The event is co-sponsored by the UWRF Student Government Association, the UWRF Honors Program, the UWRF Sustainability Office, Our Neighbor's Place, United Way of St. Croix Valley, the Pierce County Hunger Prevention Council, and other community partners.

During the CAPS event, participants engage in real-world situations often faced by people lacking enough income. Through a simulation exercise, they are given a limited amount of money meant to represent one month's earnings and must then cover costs related to their specific situations, such as a single mother having to pay for housing, childcare, transportation, food and other expenses.

CAPS is intended to not only educate attendees about those struggling to earn enough money to cover basic expenses, but to develop a sense of empathy for people living in financial distress, Hunzer said.

"I want people to empathize with a group that is often overlooked, or is looked down upon in our community," Hunzer said. "Taking part in this event forces participants to confront the difficult choices that many people face given their limited resources."

Across Wisconsin, 34% of households struggle to afford necessities such as housing, childcare, health care, food and transportation, according to the 2023 United Way of Wisconsin [ALICE Report](#). ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed and represents those earning above federal poverty wages but who are challenged to pay living expenses.

Steve McCarthy, executive director of [United Way St. Croix Valley](#), said many residents in this part of the state, even in more affluent communities such as Hudson, face financial challenges that make paying bills difficult. Those fiscal struggles have worsened in recent years as fast-rising costs of living have in many cases outpaced people's ability to pay.

In Pierce County, the combined ALICE and poverty population in 2023 was 37%; that figure totaled 28% in St. Croix County; 33% in Polk County; and 37% in Burnett County, regions overseen by United Way St. Croix Valley.

"You even have professionals, people like teachers, who can't afford to live in some communities and must move further out and travel to their jobs," McCarthy said, noting housing is an especially large cost for many. "The number of people struggling continues to climb and people are left to make some very difficult choices."

While curbing the trend of rising ALICE numbers seems daunting, efforts must be made to enact better public policy to do so, McCarthy said. He hopes events like CAPS raise public awareness and prompt people to demand change.

"What we're seeing is a continuation of a long-term trend of wage inequality," he said. "I hope this event opens people's eyes to understand that this level of struggle for so many people is not normal, and we should not accept it but should instead try to do better."

While some may view the CAPS exercise as a well-intended game, it carries a much greater meaning, Hunzer said. The

event represents the very real challenging situations that many people in this community face.

“Part of what we are trying to do with this is to shift the perspective from blaming people for being in poverty to understanding the reasons people find themselves not having enough money and the challenges they face,” Hunzer said.

In addition to raising awareness about and empathy for people experiencing financial difficulties, Hunzer said she hopes the CAPS event transforms perspectives about poverty and helps inspire action to reduce ALICE numbers.

“Events like this are about raising awareness but also planting the seeds of change and the idea that we can all make a difference,” Hunzer said.

For more information, email kathleen.hunzer@uwrf.edu or call 715-425-4725.



Ann and Manley Olson have endowed a scholarship that will provide \$1,200 annually to an elementary education major attending UW-River Falls, with a preference that the recipient be a Hudson resident. The scholarship is named for Ann's mother, Blanche Hansen Nygard, and her aunt, Meta Hansen, UWRF alums who had long, successful careers as educators.

Leaving a legacy: New scholarship at UW-River Falls will assist aspiring teachers

Scholarship named for two Hudson sisters who had longtime careers as educators

April 5, 2024 – The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has received funding for a new endowed scholarship designed to benefit students from Hudson with a love of education.

The Blanche Hansen Nygard and Meta Hansen Elementary Education Scholarship will provide \$1,200 annually to an elementary education major attending UW-River Falls, with a preference that the recipient be a Hudson resident. The scholarship is named for two former Hudson residents, sisters who attended UW-River Falls, where they earned education degrees and then spent their careers as educators.

Scholarship donors Manley and Ann Olson said the award is intended to help students from the sisters' hometown carry on their legacy of teaching students. In addition to this scholarship, the Olsons fund three other scholarships at UW-River Falls.

Blanche Hansen Nygard was Ann's mother and Meta Hansen was her aunt. Both received their degrees from UW-River Falls and went on to long teaching careers.

Nygard taught in Hudson but was forced to resign once she married, as female teachers could not be married at that time. When her husband died unexpectedly, she returned to teaching and taught the children of some of her former students.

Hansen was a teacher and school principal in Minneapolis for more than 40 years.

"I can think of no better way to honor their dedicated careers than to encourage other Hudson students to become teachers," Ann said of the endowed scholarship.

The Olsons met while they were students at UW-River Falls. Manley, '59, was a member of the Falcon varsity basketball team. He went on to a long and successful career at Normandale Community College in Bloomington, Minn. He also served for many years on the UW-River Falls Foundation Board of Directors.

The Olsons first established the education scholarship in 2015 and have funded it annually before deciding to make it an endowed fund, which ensures it will provide educational opportunities going forward.

The scholarship ties directly to the important role that teacher education has played at UW-River Falls, which was founded 150 years ago as a teaching college, said Rick Foy, assistant chancellor for university advancement.

"The education program remains a well-regarded and critical program in supplying high quality teachers to the St. Croix Valley and beyond," Foy said. "UWRF provides a perfect location for Hudson graduates interested in pursuing a degree in elementary education. It's wonderful to have this meaningful incentive available to students. We thank the Olsons for their long-time and generous commitment to UWRF students."



UW-River Falls Physics Professor Glenn Spiczak, seated, looks at the solar eclipse through a protective shield Monday afternoon with other faculty, staff, students and community members. Overcast skies spoiled the view for most in the upper Midwest, but the event still brought out many to Centennial Science Hall to catch a glimpse of some change in the sky and learn more about the phenomenon.

Totally eclipsed: UW-River Falls hosts gathering for solar occurrence

Happening not visible in River Falls; event highlights university's astronomy research

April 9, 2024 – One moment the moon nearly blotted out the sun, with only a curved sliver of light showing around the edge of the moon's dark body. Then the moon moved a bit more, completely blocking the sun's brightness.

"There, it happened. The total eclipse," Glenn Spiczak, physics professor at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, said April 8 as he pointed to a laptop screen in front of him.

Unfortunately, such a clear vision of the eclipse was not possible in person in River Falls, thanks to overcast skies that spoiled onlookers' view of the total solar eclipse celebrated by people around the world Monday. Instead, Spiczak noted the eclipse occurring in Mazatlán, Mexico, shortly after 1 p.m. Central Standard Time as it played out on a computer screen.

Spiczak was joined by about 50 people outside of Centennial Science Hall hoping to see the event that was last visible from the contiguous U.S. in 2017 and won't be again until 2044.

People gathered to view the solar eclipse, some donning protective eyewear, looked skyward, hoping for the clouds to clear and offer them a view of the much-anticipated celestial happening. Their anticipation grew as total solar eclipses happened on Spiczak's screen on locations across the U.S., moving toward River Falls.

With each eclipse, Spiczak described to onlookers the details of the events playing out on his screen. Even when a solar eclipse happens, he explained, bright light emanates from the eclipse's edges because of solar energy.

"You can get some really beautiful images when an eclipse occurs," he said.

Spiczak's affinity for all things solar system was evident during the solar eclipse, a fondness shared by UW-River Falls students studying physics and astronomy. They are involved in doing high-level research with neutron monitors in collaboration with the IceCube South Pole Neutrino Observatory at the geographic South Pole.

Last semester, one of his students conducted similar research with neutron monitors at another site in Greenland, Spiczak said. Other students are studying to what extent the moon's movement impacts the sun's cosmic rays.

"These are the kinds of things that our students are conducting important research on," Spiczak said. "They are helping the scientific community make progress on some of the big issues."

Some of those gathered at UWRF to view the solar eclipse were knowledgeable about such events, while others were simply there to experience an event that captured global attention. They spoke hopefully when the sky lightened momentarily, then were resigned to not being able to view the solar eclipse when the clouds remained. Several mentioned the last total solar eclipse in 2017, which they were able to view on campus.

Paige Donnelly, a junior from Edina, Minn., majoring in communication sciences and disorders, and her friend Gretchen Casper, a junior from Chicago majoring in environmental science, had planned to travel south to view the solar eclipse. They decided against that because of travel concerns prompted by so many others heading south and had hoped the clouds would part shortly after 2 p.m. in River Falls when the eclipse was occurring overhead.

Donnelly, Casper, and others noticed the sky darken a bit a couple of minutes past 2 p.m. But cloudy skies meant the solar eclipse happening overhead wasn't visible. Onlookers waited a few minutes, wishfully discussing what they were missing as some viewed another live eclipse happening elsewhere on Spiczak's screen. Then the group dispersed.

"I thought we might get lucky and see it," said Dolly Shoemaker, '97, who had traveled to campus from nearby Beldenville to view the eclipse. "I'm still glad I came. It was fun to be a part of this, and to know that other people around the world did get to see it."

BFA candidates at UW-River Falls hold exhibition

River Falls, Wis. - University of Wisconsin-River Falls senior BFA candidates Serena Ben-Avraham, Emily Bos, Hannah Ferguson, Isabelle Hammond, Mina Lee, Piper Richter, and Megan Spott will present their Bachelor of Fine Arts degree exhibitions in Gallery 101 in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building April 12-May 3. The free exhibition includes graphic design, painting, printmaking, and ceramics.

An Opening Reception is Friday, April 26, from 4-8 p.m. The reception and exhibition are open to everyone.

Serena Ben-Avraham is a ceramic artist from the Twin Cities. Ben-Avraham focuses on creating detail-oriented work that explores the capabilities of clay as a medium to simultaneously create functional tools and describe personal experiences. She plans to maintain her involvement in ceramics through exploring related career opportunities.

Emily Bos of Hollandale, Minn., is pursuing a BFA in painting. Her main focus for her painting is cartoon/animated animals doing various activities. The goal of her work is to make people smile, have them think back to their childhood when things were simpler. Bos is looking forward to more opportunities with showing her art after graduation in different exhibitions and shows.

Hannah Ferguson of Stillwater, Minn., focuses on graphic design. She creates both digital and graphite drawings typically inspired by nature and fantasy. Her future plans include creating book cover designs and graphic movie props.

Isabelle Hammond of St. Paul focuses her studies on graphic design, creative writing, and stage and screen arts. She works in both print and web media, cleanly communicating ideas through illustration, photography, and typography. She is an in-house graphic designer at King of Kings Lutheran Church.

Piper Richter of Rice Lake is majoring in art education/ceramics. Richter dedicates her time working on ceramics along with printmaking and drawing. Her work embodies feelings of joy and happiness inviting viewers to pick up and interact with it, while encouraging viewers to enter a new space entirely during her shows. Two of her prints recently received awards in the UWRF Student Juried Art Exhibition. Richter plans to pursue a career in secondary education, working with middle schoolers and high schoolers. While teaching, she intends to pursue her MFA in ceramics.

Megan Spott of St. Croix County is pursuing a BFA in ceramics. Wildlife plays a major role of inspiration in her works, studying fur patterns, colors and small details to capture life-like representations of animals. She only uses red earthenware because of the warmth the clay body brings out and the natural connection to the earth. Spott is starting a ceramics studio in her home and plans to sell pieces through her business Celtic Wolf Ceramics.

Mina Lee is a painter and illustrator in Woodbury, Minn. She is pursuing two undergraduate degrees including a BFA in painting and a BS in piano performance. She has earned a place on the Dean's List in the College of Arts and Sciences for four consecutive years and received multiple scholarships including the 2022 Virginia M Eastman Music Scholarship, the 2023 Lily T. Wong Memorial Scholarship, and the 2023 Walker D. and Helen Bryant Wyman Scholarship for the Arts. Her works were chosen for the Student Juried Exhibition, by the visiting juror, Gregory Rose. Her piece, Abandoned City, was accepted into the final round of the 2023 National Chinese EXPO of Student Works. She has works published in the 2024 UWRF Literature and Arts Journal - Prologue. She is also participating in the Flow Project, a program that matches artists with water professionals to create art inspired by water. Lee is in the process of becoming a freelance artist, producing her

own paintings through commissions and prints.

For more information about the exhibition, including open hours, call 715-425-3266 or email michael.helke@uwrf.edu.



Animal behavior expert Temple Grandin describes a more humane animal processing design she invented to a class of UW-River Falls students Wednesday during her visit to UWRF. Students discussed animal welfare, Grandin's career, and other issues with her.

Students interact with animal welfare icon Temple Grandin

Participants grateful for opportunity to talk with, learn from teacher of humane animal practices

April 11, 2024 – When University of Wisconsin-River Falls student Kelsey Kuehni had a question on April 10 about what is best practice when a mother pig scheduled for slaughter has babies, she had one of the world's foremost experts at hand to give her the answer.

Temple Grandin, known worldwide for her work as a proponent of the humane treatment of livestock to be slaughtered and as a spokeswoman for autism, visited UW-River Falls Wednesday. A professor of animal science at Colorado State University, Grandin spent time with two animal behavior classes, answering students' questions and discussing her work in the animal welfare field. She also toured campus facilities, including the campus Meat Pilot Plant.

During Grandin's discussion with an advanced animal behavior class, Kuehni, a senior from Stanley majoring in animal science, asked Grandin questions and showed her photos of the mom pig and her babies birthed just before the mother was scheduled for slaughter. Grandin responded that the mother's life should be spared so she can help raise her babies.

"We need to think more about the betterment of the animals and not always be maximizing profit," Grandin said, noting that more humane treatment of animals actually helps farmers' and meat processors' bottom lines.

Students had the opportunity to interact with Grandin in small groups and in some cases have one-on-one discussions with her. The classes Grandin attended were question-and-answer sessions in which students queried her about everything from her career to the most humane livestock butchering practices.

Grandin, 76, didn't grow up on a farm, she told students, and was introduced to cattle as a teenager. She began her work in agriculture writing stories for an ag magazine. At that time, the agriculture world was dominated by men, and writing about agriculture offered Grandin a way into the industry, she said.

"It wasn't easy to be a woman and be in the agriculture industry in those days," Grandin said. "If I

hadn't walked up to an editor and told him I wanted to write for him, and then produced one article and then another, I wouldn't have done what I have since then. When you have an opportunity, you need to go for it. You never know what it will lead to."

Grandin eventually moved on from writing to working directly in the agriculture industry, developing new, more humane methods of dealing with animals. Among her many innovations that have become industry standards, Grandin developed a five-point scoring system to improve and track humane treatment of animals as part of the slaughtering process. Her ideas gained additional credibility, she said, when major food chains McDonald's, Wendy's and Burger King saw the benefits.

"I am most proud of my system for animal welfare, for helping ensure that animals are being treated more humanely," she said. "It makes me feel like I have made a positive difference."

Having autism can present challenges, according to Grandin, but has also worked to her benefit. She views the world in a visual manner that better enables her to see from animals' perspectives and how to address their fears or concerns.

"In a way (autism) works for me. It helps me see details that others don't," Grandin said.

The chance to learn from a world-renowned personality wasn't lost on Kuehni and other students.

"It was a really cool experience," Kuehni said of her discussion with Grandin. "I've looked up to her for a while and read some of her books. It was great to get her thoughts on the (meat processing) industry and to learn about her career."

Seven Ferguson, a graduate of Ohio State University working as a research assistant in dairy welfare at UW-River Falls, said she was impressed with Grandin's high energy level, deep knowledge and frank manner.

"She is very outspoken and is quick on her feet when answering questions," said Ferguson, of Toledo, Ohio, who will begin her graduate studies at UW-River Falls in the fall. "She has so many interesting stories to tell, and so much knowledge to share with us."

UWRF Animal Science Professor Kurt Vogel first met Grandin while working in a large, now defunct meat processing plant in Milwaukee. Grandin eventually convinced Vogel to study under her at Colorado State University. The two remain close friends, and Vogel credits Grandin with his professional success which includes his starting the Humane Handling Institute at UW-River Falls, the first-of-its-kind training program for meat processors.

Vogel said he was thankful and honored as he watched Grandin interact with students.

“A lot of what I teach came from her, so she has already had her impact on my students,” Vogel said. “I am so happy to facilitate her connection to them.”



Scout Emery, right, the 2024 UW-River Falls Queen of the Rodeo, and Faith Watz, left, carry a baby goat and supplies at the start of UWRF's Ag Day on Campus. The UWRF Collegiate Farm Bureau Chapter annually hosts Ag Day on Campus, which began in 2012. This year's theme was "Growing for Generations." The event included numerous informational booths, fun contests and more throughout the day on the campus mall. It concluded with a free evening meal in the Agricultural Science building and a panel discussion in the University Center about the future of agriculture. UWRF/Pat Deninger photo.

UW-River Falls event highlights importance of agriculture

Ag Day on Campus included plenty of educational, fun events

River Falls, Wis. – Agriculture was visible in many ways during the Ag Day on Campus event April 11 at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

The event began with speeches by numerous people associated with ag-based organizations, including Randy Romanski, secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. A large John Deere tractor was parked near a mechanical bull. A short distance away, children petted goats in a pen.

While those events are all part of Wisconsin's agriculture scene, organizers of this year's Ag Day on Campus hoped visitors took away a deeper, perhaps less obvious message: agriculture is vital to all of our lives.

"We want people to have a good time, to enjoy the different events and the booths by student ag organizations," said Aleah Cole, a senior animal science major from Sartell, Minn. "But we want them to think about what they see here, what they learn, and then realize that agriculture is what makes the food they buy in the grocery store possible."

Cole and Lashawna Vogel, a junior from Denmark majoring in agriculture marketing communications, were chief organizers of Ag Day on Campus. They stressed how the event is intended to educate attendees about the many facets of agriculture.

Teaching moments were certainly occurring at goat pens set up at one end of the event. Young children eagerly petted the animals and asked many questions about them. “What do they eat?” one youngster asked about the goats. “Why is one bigger than the other?” another queried.

“That’s what we want to see, to see those questions and that learning going on,” Cole said. “You want people to get more familiar with what happens on a farm.”

Additional learning was occurring at a couple dozen student organization booths where students answered questions and discussed various aspects of agriculture with attendees. Later in the day, students and community members attended a dinner made of locally grown food.

Romanski, a UW-River Falls alum, was attending his first Ag Day on Campus event. He said the day recognizes the vital role agriculture plays in Wisconsin, where it is a \$104.8 billion industry in which one of every nine state residents is employed.

“Where does people’s food come from? Where does their fiber come from?” Romanski said. “This event helps people make those connections.”

Michael Orth, dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES), noted the university’s “rich, longtime, strong reputation in agriculture.” UW-River Falls includes such ag-related amenities as the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence, Wisconsin’s only collegiate rodeo, and the Farm and Industry Short Course (FISC).

“These are only a few of the ways that our university connects to agriculture and natural resources,” Orth said.

Under sunny skies, event attendees participated in numerous activities. Students whooped and hollered enthusiastically as their friends took turns riding a mechanical bull. Others practiced trying to rope structures that represented cattle. Still others enjoyed fresh cheese curds produced at the campus dairy plant.

Katie Ketchum, a sophomore agricultural education major from Altura, Minn., said she hoped people at Ag Day on Campus enjoyed numerous aspects of the event. She also wanted them to learn about agriculture along the way.

“I get to watch people’s faces light up when they realize where their food comes from,” said Ketchum, who is Minnesota’s FFA state president. “It is so important that people get to know that, and this event today helps them do that.”



Ten UW-River Falls students were awarded the Chancellor's Award for Students during a banquet and ceremony on campus Wednesday. Front row (l to r): Chancellor Maria Gallo, Kendra Jentz, SirrNay Ku, Veronica Klenke, Lauren Schmelzer, and Kalli Kubly. Back row: Mayala Keita, Mark Buchmann, Sam Peters, Chloe Heifner, and Lexi Janzer.

Ten UW-River Falls students honored with Chancellor's Award

Honor given for academic excellence, service to campus and community

River Falls, Wis. – Ten University of Wisconsin-River Falls students on Wednesday received the Chancellor's Award for Students, the highest non-academic honor they can receive at the university.

The Chancellor's Award recognizes students who have shown distinguished leadership and service on campus and in the community.

"The students receiving this award are dedicated to excelling not only in the classroom, but to making a positive impact in other ways on our campus and in our surrounding community," Chancellor Maria Gallo said. "These students exemplify the kinds of committed, high-level learning that occurs at UW-River Falls. I am excited to see the great ways these students will make our world a better place in the future."

This year's Chancellor's Award recipients:

- **Mark Buchmann**, a junior from Chippewa Falls majoring in music education, is president of several campus organizations, including the chapter of the National Association for Music Education Collegiate, the Commissioned Composer Project, and Boomwhacker Ensemble, which he founded. He is an advocate for making spaces more

accessible for people with physical disabilities.

- **Chloe Heifner**, a senior from Hudson majoring in physics and physics education, has conducted numerous research projects on her work with cosmic rays. She is the first UWRF student to have co-authored a significant research paper with Physics Professor Seruj Seunarine. She has presented her research at such events as the International Cosmic Ray Conference in Japan.
- **Lexi Janzer**, a senior from Mayville majoring in journalism and criminology, has been a standout print journalist at the UWRF student newspaper, The Student Voice, and is currently the newspaper's assistant editor. She has produced award-winning journalism in both print and audio. She also has taken leadership roles with organizations on campus and in the surrounding community.
- **Kendra Jentz**, a senior from Bloomington majoring in agriculture marketing communications, has served as the leader of numerous UWRF student organizations. She was elected by her peers as president of the Chancellor's Student Ambassadors. A strong advocate for agriculture, she has led multiple student groups in that area, including serving as president of Collegiate Farm Bureau.
- **Mayala Keita**, a senior from Coon Rapids, Minn., majoring in food science and technology, has played a prominent role in numerous UWRF student organizations, among them the Black Student Union and the Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Office. She is a strong advocate for identity-based students and others. She also represents UWRF students as a member of the Student Government Association.
- **Veronica Klenke**, a senior from Bloomer majoring in social work, has been in the Honors Program, the McNair Scholars Program and has taken part in undergraduate research projects. She is also an advocate for positive change for her peers. Klenke has served on the Student Government Association and has been a peer mentor in the Disability Resource Center.
- **SirrNay Ku**, a senior from Burlington majoring in horticulture, uses her history and previous education with floral arrangements to provide learning opportunities for her peers and others in the community. She is president of the Asian American Student Association and is an involved member of numerous organizations designed to help first-year students succeed.
- **Kalli Kubly**, a senior from Columbus majoring in accounting and criminology, has served in numerous leadership roles, including serving as president of the Student Government Association. She has been a resident assistant, worked for two years as a finance intern in the Student Involvement Office, and was selected as an intern with the Federal Bureau of Investigations.
- **Samuel Peters**, a senior from St. Paul, Minn., majoring in broad field social studies, has been a leader of the UWRF track and field and cross country teams, having been captain of both since 2022. He is a leader in the Admissions Office and with other university programs that help incoming students successfully adapt to college life.
- **Lauren Schmelzer**, a senior from St. Louis Park, Minn., majoring in environmental science, has been highly involved in numerous sustainability-related efforts at UWRF through the Sustainability Office. She helped develop a bee habitat and pollinator-friendly environment on campus and served as vice president and social media coordinator of the Environmental Sustainability Club and Bee Club.

The awards were presented during a reception in the Riverview Ballroom in the University Center. Students are nominated by a faculty member, staff member, or student peer. Student recipients have completed undergraduate research and demonstrated undergraduate research, inclusivity and service to the community and university. First awarded in 1980, the award has been presented to 327 outstanding students.

Travis Crow is Wyman Visiting Professor in Art April 29

Public lecture: “Eating the Dogfood: Workshop Findings and Next Steps”

April 18, 2024 - Travis Crow, the Spring 2024 Walker D. and Helen Bryant Wyman Visiting Professor in Art at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, will deliver a free public lecture on Monday, April 29, from 5-6:30 p.m. in North Hall Auditorium.

Crow's lecture, “Eating the Dogfood: Workshop Findings and Next Steps” explores the intersection of business and creativity and highlights some of the journeys resulting from the workshops he led with UWRF students.

Crow is a business consultant who has worked with brands such as Marc Jacobs, Hershey, Harley Davidson, John Deere, and various medical companies. He has been recognized for his work in branding, design thinking, and overall strategy and execution to cultivate diverse and profitable ecosystems where creativity flourishes.

For more information, call the UWRF Art Department at 715-425-4629 or email kaylee.spencer@uwrf.edu

Board of Regents president to speak at UW-River Falls commencement

May 4 graduation to include three ceremonies, new site

River Falls, Wis. – The president of the Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents will be the keynote speaker at this year's University of Wisconsin-River Falls spring commencement on Saturday, May 4, an opportunity she sought after visiting the campus in October 2023.



Karen Walsh, Regents president since 2022 and a BOR member since her appointment in 2019, will address attendees of the three graduation ceremonies at Page Arena in the Falcon Center.

“When we were there in October, I met so many amazing students,” Walsh said. “They had such passion about their fields of study. I was so impressed by them and the work they are doing and their passion for it that I decided that I would like to speak at commencement.”

A total of 704 students are scheduled to graduate. Of those, 618 will receive their bachelor's degree, 84 their master's degree and two their associate degree.

This year's spring commencement ceremony will involve changes from recent years.

The location has changed to Page Arena after having occurred in Knowles Field House in recent years. Graduation this year also will include three ceremonies, one for each of the university's three colleges. The ceremony for the College of Education, Business and Allied Health (CEBAH), along with Graduate Studies, is at 8:30 a.m.; the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) at noon; and the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) at 3:30 p.m.

Walsh, a native of Columbus, graduated from UW-Madison with a bachelor's degree in journalism. She was a reporter for news outlets, including Wisconsin Public Radio, before working for 23 years at UW-Madison in a variety of public relations positions.

She retired from UW-Madison in 2005 as assistant dean for external relations in the College of Engineering. In that job, she oversaw alumni and donor communications, news media relations, and the college's undergraduate invention and prototyping competitions. She has received publications awards with the National Association of Government Communicators, UW-Madison's Bollinger Academic Staff Achievement Award, and Philanthropist of the Year from the Dane County Humane Society.

Walsh is director of the BerbeeWalsh Foundation, a family foundation dedicated to human and animal health and welfare. Since 2006, the foundation has awarded more than \$8 million in grants in the state of Wisconsin, including a gift to the University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics that created the BerbeeWalsh Department of Emergency Medicine.

Having the BOR president as commencement keynote speaker is an honor, UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo said. Walsh's relatability to students is a sign of her sincere commitment to ensuring they have opportunities that prepare them for future success, she said.

"President Walsh sincerely cares for the students at our university and those at other Universities of Wisconsin schools," Gallo said. "She serves as a shining example of someone who has used the education she received to make a significant, positive difference for many."

Walsh hoped to speak at the Dec. 16 commencement at UW-River Falls, but her schedule did not allow her to do so.

"This is a time to recognize these students and the great programs that UW-River Falls does so well and is known around the country for," Walsh said. "Commencement is a time to celebrate all that these students have done to get to this day, and also a time to celebrate all that they have ahead of them."

Commencement ceremonies will also be available via livestream. For more information, go to the commencement website, <https://www.uwrf.edu/Commencement/>.

UW-River Falls to host May 2 event to discuss Veterans' mental health

Session made possible by grant from Universities of Wisconsin

River Falls, Wis. – The University of Wisconsin-River Falls will host a Thursday, May 2, discussion about mental health concerns among Veterans and military students, an event made possible by a \$5,000 grant the university has received to support that population.



The public is invited to hear Mike Waldron, executive director of 23rd Veteran, speak about the work he and his organization are doing to support the well-being of Veterans and military students. Waldon will speak at two sessions: one from 11 a.m.-noon and the other from 1:30-2:30 p.m., both in the Trimbelle River Room in the University Center, 501 Wild Rose Ave., on campus. Refreshments will be served.

UW-River Falls received the grant from UW System Veteran and Military Connected Student Support, with the goal of heightening awareness of the need to support the success of Veterans and military students at the university. That support can come in various ways, such as academic, financial, physical, mental, and social needs.

Joe Kmiech, chief information officer in the UWRF Division of Technology Services and a Veteran, said the grant will help provide a variety of services to Veterans and military students, including efforts to address mental health. The funding is especially timely, he said, given ongoing concerns about Veterans' mental health and the fact that four UWRF students died by suicide last semester.

"Looking at the events of last semester and trying to prevent further possible suicides is of particular concern to us on our campus," Kmiech said. "It's important to have these types of grants and programs with the work we do here with our Veterans and military students."

In a variety of ways, 23rd Veteran works to support Veterans and prevent suicides by military members. According to the organization Stop Soldier Suicide, Veterans are at a 72% higher risk of suicide than people who have not served in the military.

UW-River Falls is a military friendly university that is proud to support America's armed forces. Questions about the event can be directed to joseph.kmeich@uwrf.edu.



A participant in Saturday's Earth Fest 2024 hosted at UW-River Falls looks at one of the 100 exhibits spread throughout three floors in the University Center and outdoors on the campus mall. The annual community event was its largest yet, with an estimated 2,500 people in attendance. Paul Douglas, well-known Twin Cities meteorologist, broadcaster, entrepreneur and author, spoke about climate change to a standing-room-only audience in the Falcon's Nest. UWRF/Pat Deninger photo.

Striking gold: Efforts to improve sustainability net UW-River Falls its highest rating

Sustainability efforts scored high by engaging campus and community

River Falls, Wis. – From helping stage Earth Fest in conjunction with Earth Day, to creating a bee hotel and a surrounding pollinator-friendly garden, the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Sustainability Office and partners have taken an increasingly active role on campus and in the surrounding community.

Those efforts are reflected in a newly released rating in which the UWRF sustainability program has received a STARS Gold rating in recognition of its sustainability achievements from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System) measures and encourages sustainability in all aspects of higher education. Ratings are awarded in Reporter, Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum levels, with Platinum the highest.

The current STARS report rating is the highest that UWRF has achieved and is a measure of the commitment to integrating sustainability into as many aspects of campus operations and those of the River Falls area as possible, Sustainability Coordinator Mark Klapatch-Mathias said. The award's official announcement on Earth Day is especially fitting, he said.

"I am extremely proud of the Gold rating because it shows the improvements we continue to make in ensuring that sustainability is a larger part of our everyday life here at UWRF and in the surrounding community," Klapatch-Mathias said. "The students involved in our Sustainability Office have worked hard to strive to increase sustainability practices in many ways and this rating would not be possible without their diligent efforts."

UWRF completes a STARS report every three years and previously attained a Silver rating in 2021. It is the only Universities of Wisconsin school with a current Gold rating. The full UWRF STARS report can be found here and an abbreviated executive summary highlighting accomplishments and opportunities can be found here.

With more than 900 participants in 40 countries, AASHE's STARS program is the most widely recognized rating system in the world for publicly reporting comprehensive information about a college or university's sustainability performance. Participants report achievements in five overall areas: academics, engagement, operations, planning and administration, and innovation and leadership.

A key move that boosted sustainability progress was adding it as a core value at UWRF and making it part of the university's strategic plan. That has helped garner more support for and engagement with sustainability initiatives from across campus, Klapatch-Mathias said.

UWRF scored high in the STARS Report in multiple areas, such as incorporating sustainability into the curriculum and engaging campus and the surrounding community. Bonus points were received for such sustainability practices as having designations for Fair Trade Campus and Bee Campus.

Chancellor Maria Gallo said the university's Gold rating is a sign of the strong commitment by faculty, staff and students at UW-River Falls to incorporating sustainable practices on campus.

"Sustainability is one of UWRF's core values and is prominent in both the academic and strategic plans," Gallo said. "Achieving a Gold rating and our highest score to date is an incredible accomplishment and a true demonstration of what is possible when priorities are set and the entire campus community aligns their efforts."

Students involved with sustainability efforts at UWRF said they have worked to raise awareness about the topic in many ways, from partnering with the city of River Falls and other organizations to setting up booths on campus and speaking at events. Students can be part of numerous sustainability-related clubs and create additional ways for the campus to be more sustainable.

"Our clubs have been really active in bringing attention to different forms of sustainability," said Lauren Schmelzer, a senior from St. Louis Park, Minn., who is majoring in environmental science. "Focusing on collaborative events has gotten more people interested in this issue and raised awareness that sustainability exists."

Kaitlin Ramirez was among students who worked to make UWRF a certified Fair Trade School. Getting everyone on board to support the idea and integrate Fair Trade practices into the university's dining service proved challenging, she said, noting the effort took 1 ½ years to complete. Ramirez is a senior from Round Lake, Ill., who is majoring in environmental planning.

"It was definitely a lot of work," she said, "but we were able to do it. This is one more way we are making this campus more sustainable."

Despite those accomplishments, the university and River Falls community have room to improve in terms of adopting sustainable practices, students and Klapatch-Mathias said. For example, UWRF buildings typically don't rank high in terms of environmentally friendly measures, Klapatch-Mathias said, and engagement of community and campus could always be better.

"We have made significant positive strides," Klapatch-Mathias said, "but it's not like sustainability practices are mainstream yet. We definitely have more work to do as a group and as a community to become more sustainable. That is a good challenge, to see how much more we can accomplish."

The UWRF Foundation has established a fund to support the university's sustainability programs at <https://www.uwrf.edu/give/sustainability.cfm>. For more information, contact Klapatch-Mathias at mark.klapatch@uwrf.edu or 715-425-4333.



From left, Hudson Hospital Foundation leaders Debi Mager, foundation officer, and Erika Schendel, director, present UW-River Falls with a \$5,000 check Monday to expand its wellness efforts. UW-River Falls Foundation President Amy Zimmer, third from left, receives the check along with members of the university's Engagement Committee Mesa Carlsen, Bethany Crail and Ryan Rudesill. UWRF/Pat Deninger photo.

Grant to UW-River Falls will expand wellness opportunities for employees, students

Hudson Hospital Foundation donates \$5,000 to increase health-related activities

April 24, 2024 – The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has received a \$5,000 grant to help fund a variety of wellness initiatives on campus that include addressing mental health needs.

The Hudson Hospital Foundation presented UW-River Falls with that funding Monday to expand the university's continuing mental health efforts and other wellness programs. UW-River Falls Foundation President Amy Zimmer received a check in that amount along with members of the university's Engagement Committee that sought the grant funding.

"We were thrilled to learn the grant had been approved by the Hudson Hospital Foundation to support campus wellness activities," Zimmer said. "We are so grateful to them for making this important investment in our university."

The additional dollars will enable the expansion of wellness-related activities to a greater campus population, Zimmer said.

The funds will support not only mental health but personal wellbeing, nutrition, and physical activity programs for the campus' employees and 5,000 students.

Throughout the year, the Engagement Committee will provide opportunities related to the funding, such as events, speakers, social activities, wellness seminars, and mental health training. Some wellness activities made possible by the grant will include mental health offerings, a continuation of efforts in recent months to boost mental health availability on campus.

Committee members hope the activities they organize "can lead to healthier and positive lifestyles, longevity, and an overall positive mentality," the grant application states. Committee member Mesa Carlsen said she applied for the grant to expand the availability of programs that teach healthy practices at UW-River Falls.

"I wanted to apply for a grant that could cover more of the costs associated with putting on these healthy events for our campus," she said. "We're trying to find ways to help people de-stress and build healthier lifestyles."

In addition to expanded wellness offerings, the Engagement Committee focuses on areas such as employee wellness, networking opportunities, recognition, volunteer opportunities and increasing employees' connection to the university.

UW-River Falls to host speakers about free speech May 6

Speakers with FIRE to discuss importance of civil liberties on college campuses

April 25, 2024 – As civil liberties challenges are playing out in real time at colleges across the country, the University of Wisconsin-River Falls will host two speakers on May 6 with a nationally known organization to discuss the importance of first amendment rights on campuses.

Graham Piro and Gabe Walters, with the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), are scheduled to speak on first amendment rights and the vital role they play in a college setting. The event, at 6 p.m. Monday, May 6, in the Falcon's Nest of the University Center, 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls, will include a Q&A session and is free and open to the public.

FIRE's mission is to defend and protect the Americans' rights of free speech and thought. The nonpartisan organization educates about these rights, promotes open discussion and respect, and advocates for preserving them.

Piro is program officer for FIRE's campus rights advocacy team; Walters works on the organization's legal team.

"Right now on campuses, the first amendment is really being tested," Piro said. "At all times and especially at times like this, it is vital that people understand the importance of first amendment rights and what they protect."

In recent months, administrators at some colleges and universities have taken actions to shut down or otherwise hinder student organizations that have staged campus events to protest Israel's war on Palestine. Other free speech issues also have surfaced at campuses in recent years in Wisconsin and elsewhere around topics such as diversity, equity, and inclusion; mandatory diversity statements; and how much control professors have over what they teach in their classes.

On those subjects and others, free speech can provide a means of discussing issues, even controversial ones, in a civil, thoughtful manner, Piro said.

Wesley Kisting, UWRF dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, wanted to bring FIRE to the university to facilitate discussion of the importance of first amendment rights on college campuses. As a nonpartisan, highly respected organization, FIRE lends discussion of civil liberties a high degree of credibility, he said.

Higher education is built upon the idea of a free and open discussion of issues and oftentimes involves challenging ideas or perceptions, Kisting said. Real or perceived efforts to curtail such discussion poses a threat to education and to American society at large, he said.

"This topic is especially important now, in this highly politically divided time," Kisting said. "Without robust, open conversation, higher education cannot work the way it is supposed to, and it can constrain the development of good ideas."

While free speech and civil liberties currently face challenges on campuses across America, Piro said he still hopes that people can come together to respect a wide range of viewpoints. Doing so now is especially important given the current divisive climate, he said.

“Free speech should be something that people on both the left and the right can agree on,” Piro said. “We hope our presentation will be able to allow people to shed some light on the importance of the first amendment on college campuses and prompt a climate that promotes free speech.”



CAFES Dean Michael Orth presents the Lawrence F. Jerome family with a framed copy of the charcoal sketch of Jerome's portrait that hangs in the Agriculture Hall of Fame in the Agricultural Science building on campus. The late Jerome was recently named the 2024 Wisconsin Distinguished Agriculturalist. L-R: Moriah Fischer, Indira VanHandel, Shelley Jerome, Mike Orth, Daria Stransky, Alicia Wirth.

Second Jerome family member honored with Wisconsin Distinguished Agriculturalist Award

River Falls, Wis. -- Lawrence F. Jerome has been named the 2024 Wisconsin Distinguished Agriculturalist by the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. Jerome was the owner of Jerland Farms until his passing earlier this year.



The award was presented April 18 to Jerome's family at the 58th Annual Scholarship and Awards Program in front of an audience of more than 200 students, donors, faculty and staff.

CAFES Dean Michael Orth announced the award and invited Emeritus Professor of Animal Science Gary Onan, who nominated Jerome for the award, to say a few words. Onan described Jerome as a true Renaissance man, an accomplished musician, a



highly regarded motivational speaker, a person of strong faith who embraced a diversity of cultures, and a very talented and successful animal breeder.

“Larry was so good at animal selection and planning appropriate matings that it was almost as if he was born with an advanced degree in animal breeding,” said Onan.

Jerome was most noted for his work with Holstein cattle, Arabian horses and German Shepherd dogs, but over his career he also maintained herds of Shorthorn and Main Anjou beef cattle, Brown Swiss dairy cattle and Belgian horses. Jerland dairy genetics, Jerland Arabians and Jerland dogs are found around the world. Jerome had numerous class champions and at least one Supreme Champion at World Dairy Expo, and two premier Arabian stallions whose offspring have garnered at least 46 national championships. For his work with Arabians, Jerome was honored with the World Cup Top Five Breeder Award and as a Breeder of Distinction, and in 2023 with the Arabian Horse Breeders Alliance Lifetime Achievement Award.

Onan first became acquainted with Jerome at the Barron County Fair. In his remarks, he also highlighted Jerome’s long-standing commitment to youth livestock programs through his work with 4-H, FFA and the Barron County Fair. Jerome was always interested in technological advances for livestock production, including the use of ultrasound scanning for animal body composition evaluation. He personally funded and oversaw a project to install a state-of-the-art scanning and evaluation system that provides immediate visual feedback for exhibitors, the most sophisticated system at any fair in the state and possibly the nation.

The Wisconsin Distinguished Agriculturalist Award was established in 1970 to recognize individuals who have provided leadership, service and other contributions to the broader agricultural community.

Jerome’s family was presented with a framed copy of the charcoal sketch of his portrait that hangs in the Agriculture Hall of Fame in the Agricultural Science building on campus. Visit www.uwrf.edu/CAFES/Awards.cfm to see previous honorees, which include Wallace H. Jerome, Larry’s father. They are the second father and son to receive the Wisconsin Distinguished Agriculturalist Award.



Chippewa Valley Technical College President Sunem Beaton-Garcia, left, and UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo converse during Tuesday's Reaffirmation Day in Eau Claire. The annual event reaffirms the commitment by UWRF and CVTC to work together to allow students to access programs at both institutions and transfer more easily. UWRF photo.

Reaffirming a commitment to students

Partnership between UWRF, CVTC provides additional educational options

River Falls, Wis. – Shortly after enrolling at Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) last year, Holly Hufnagle learned she might not receive college credit for some of the Advanced Placement (AP) coursework she had completed in high school.

Frustrated, Hufnagle reached out to academic advisers at CVTC to see if those AP courses could count toward the associate degree she was seeking. She and her adviser worked through possibilities and ultimately found a solution that allowed Hufnagle to receive credit for those classes.

“My biggest advice to students is talk with your advisers,” Hufnagle said. “If I had not done that, I would not be graduating with my associate degree next month and continuing my education journey. Reaching out can be kind of scary. But it really, really helps.”

Hufnagle will continue her academic career at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls beginning in the fall, when she will pursue a degree in biomedical and health science. She is one of many students who begin at CVTC and then go on to further their education at UW-River Falls, a process made easier because of an agreement established three years ago between the two schools.

On Tuesday, the schools met at CVTC's Eau Claire campus to reaffirm their commitment to enable students like Hufnagle to

transfer from CVTC to UW-River Falls more easily. The agreement also enables students at both schools to access programs at the other institution and has established numerous classes and pathways to help students reach their academic goals.

The Reaffirmation Day event included speakers from both schools discussing the importance of students being able to access academic programming in a way that helps them accomplish their academic goals. A student panel discussed challenges they face in navigating transferring schools and successes they have found through the relationship formed and strengthened by the two institutions. Event attendees took part in breakout sessions designed to refine and strengthen the agreement, providing students with even more options.

“This work is really important in terms of offering our students as many opportunities as possible to find their academic paths and provide them with the resources they need to have successful outcomes,” UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo said.

CVTC President Sunem Beaton-Garcia agreed, noting the many course options available to students at both schools that didn’t exist before the schools began working closely together three years ago. Continuing to evolve and expand the agreement is necessary given the changing job market and ongoing efforts to attract and retain students, she said.

“We work all year long to create great outcomes,” Beaton-Garcia said. “We need to continue to do that work and to be willing to address the areas where we may be falling short.”

UW-River Falls and CVTC staff work closely together to help students navigate transferring and accessing programs at the two schools, said David Toles, assistant director of admissions at UW-River Falls. CVTC students who transfer to UW-River Falls come prepared for their coursework, he said, noting that 47% of them earn scholarships.

Connecting with students early in their academic careers helps make transferring easier, he said. Doing so helps students identify which courses are required to enable them to transfer and complete their majors at UW-River Falls.

“We’re doing a lot of work to help these students get (to UW-River Falls) and to have success once they get there,” Toles said.

The agreement between UW-River Falls and CVTC involves more than just transfer students. Through the agreement, students at each school are able to take courses at the other institution when needed, said Sarah Schliesmann, CVTC UW transfer advisor.

For instance, she said, UW-River Falls students may find that a course needed for them to graduate does not have openings one semester. In many instances, students can enroll in a similar course at CVTC and receive credit, thereby keeping them on track to graduate in a timely manner. The agreement also plays a huge role with student retention, she said.

“It’s not just about the traditional pathway from CVTC to UW-River Falls,” she said. “This agreement is really about offering the best available path for students at both schools.”



Chippewa Valley Technical College President Sunem Beaton-Garcia, left, and UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo, right, talk with CVTC student Holly Hufnagle during Tuesday's Reaffirmation Day event in Eau Claire. Hufnagle will graduate from CVTC with an associate degree next month before continuing her education at UW-River Falls. UWRF photo.



Michael Gilmer, dean of students at UW-River Falls, interacts with a student during a Mental Health Mondays event at the university. Gilmer has spent much of his time during his first semester at UWRF helping address programs regarding student mental health. UWRF photo.

Meeting the challenge: New dean of students helps address mental health needs

Listening to students is key to engaging them, Gilmer says

May 10, 2024 - When Michael Gilmer accepted the job as dean of students at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, he expected to learn, bit by bit, how to best ensure and enact services to help students find success.

Gilmer did just that, but at a rapid-fire rate with high-stakes outcomes. Instead of easing into his new position, Gilmer spent his first semester at UW-River Falls urgently working, right from the start, with others to address students' mental health concerns in the wake of four student suicides during fall semester. The university announced Gilmer's hiring on Dec. 4, 2023, and he started his job Jan. 9.

"It was certainly not the way I thought I would begin my job at a new school," Gilmer recalled. "I thought about how tragic it must have been for this campus to lose four students in such a short amount of time. And my knee-jerk reaction was 'How can I help?'"

Gilmer got busy collaborating with others on campus to best address student mental health. They met with state and regional mental health experts and as quickly as possible implemented initiatives designed to increase resources and programs to

meet student needs. More long-term plans aimed at improving mental health services are being worked on.

A continued focus on the topic is needed, given mental health challenges many young people across the country face, Gilmer said. The issue is garnering increased attention as May is Mental Health Awareness Month.

While dealing with mental health challenges can seem daunting at times, Gilmer's experience had prepared him. Before coming to UW-River Falls, he worked as director of student conduct and academic integrity at the University of Central Florida, the largest university in that state. Unfortunately, student suicides occurred there on an annual basis, he said.

"My past experiences, dealing with deaths at my previous place of employment, they helped me in a way to deal with what was happening when I started my job here (at UW-River Falls)," Gilmer said. "It was really hard. But we all worked together to do our best to help our students and everyone on campus get through it."

Gilmer said he was inspired by how the UW-River Falls campus and the surrounding community pulled together as they dealt with the tragedies.

"Every student's death here mattered a lot," he said.

The approach to address students mental health concerns at UW-River Falls has included a purposeful willingness to listen to student perspectives, Gilmer said. Having honest conversations with students and answering their questions has enabled improved student mental health services. He cited changes to Mental Health Mondays, a monthly effort to engage with students around mental health, as an example.

At a recent Mental Health Mondays event, Gilmer spoke with one student after another about a variety of topics, including what the university can do better in terms of addressing mental health.

"We're not afraid to listen," he said, "and we're not afraid to admit we don't have all the answers. By listening to our students, by engaging with them and hearing what they want us to do, we are improving how we can best meet their needs."

Wes Chapin, interim provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs, said Gilmer's engagement with students is symbolic of his commitment to ensuring success for as many students as possible. Gilmer frequently seeks new ways of supporting students and finds additional ways for them to engage with the university.

"He is dedicated to strengthening the welcoming environment that we embrace for all students, where both student organizations and student activities flourish," Chapin said of Gilmer. "That is critical to the success of anyone serving as dean of students and vital to a healthy campus environment."

Elise Peters oversees Mental Health Mondays and other student activities in her role as events and activities coordinator for Student Involvement. She praised Gilmer for his willingness to engage with students and his ability to think outside the box to meet student needs.

"It is exciting to be able to work with Michael and his office to support some of these purposeful efforts to work with students who have specific needs," Peters said. "He is definitely committed to helping students."

Gilmer said he was drawn to UW-River Falls because of its relatively small size of about 5,000 students and its close-knit

community. After being employed at Florida's largest university, the idea of working in a place where people are more familiar with each other is appealing, he said. He enjoys being invited to classes, listening to students sing in choir, and talking about student government. He appreciated being asked to judge a recent hog-calling contest on campus.

"I wanted to work at an institution small enough where you believed you were more than just a number," Gilmer said.

"Everything I found about UW-River Falls is that this is a place where students matter. And I feel like I can play a critical role in helping them know that they matter."

As spring semester comes to an end, Gilmer is working toward more mental health initiatives, more ways to help students feel connected to the university he said he already feels attached to. Doing so successfully will require continued engagement with students and a willingness to listen to them.

"There are days that are hard for sure," he said. "But I do this because I love it. I love learning from the students and all that they have to teach us."

Regent president tells UW-River Falls graduates their experiences have prepared them for success

High-level education, resilience will help overcome challenges, Walsh says

May 4, 2024 – University of Wisconsin-River Falls students are graduating at a time filled with both daunting challenges and exciting opportunities, and their college experiences have prepared them well for their future, Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents President Karen Walsh told attendees of the university's spring graduation ceremonies Saturday.



"You begin your life as UW-River Falls alumni in exciting and challenging times," Walsh said to graduates. "Incredible opportunities lie ahead. And I've never seen a generation more ready to challenge us to do better."

Walsh addressed graduates at three separate commencement ceremonies in Page Arena at the Falcon Center on campus. A total of 712 students graduated, with 617 receiving bachelor's degrees, 94 master's degrees and one associate degree.

When these graduates enrolled at UWRF back in fall 2020, many chose to attend classes virtually because of the pandemic, UWRF Chancellor Maria Gallo told those in attendance. She praised students for their resilience and described numerous highlights on campus during their four years, ranging from the ongoing construction of the Science and Technology Innovation Center to the women's hockey team winning the 2023-24 NCAA Division III national championship.

Gallo urged graduates to follow their passion and to work to make the world a better place.

"On this commencement day, as the name indicates, this is not the end but only the beginning for you as you leave with your UW-River Falls education and use it to fulfill our mission of being productive, creative, ethical, and engaged citizens with an informed global perspective," Gallo said.

During her keynote address, Walsh urged graduates to remember lessons learned during their time as UWRF students. She credited them with graduating despite difficulties that included beginning their higher education academic careers during the coronavirus pandemic.

"The fact that you have persevered through life's ups and downs and are graduating tells me that not only are you smart, you are also resilient and determined," Walsh said.

Walsh told graduates they should learn from the past as they make their way into the future. Combining education and service to community will enable them to make positive impacts wherever they go, she said. Graduates should look for needs in their communities and then find solutions to those issues.

"The Universities of Wisconsin have always believed, as I do, that we should benefit and learn from the past and think and train for the future," she said.

Walsh praised the value of a degree from Universities of Wisconsin schools. A Columbus native, she graduated from UW-Madison with a bachelor's degree in journalism before working for several news outlets. She then worked for 23 years at UW-Madison in a variety of public relations jobs. She retired from UW-Madison in 2005 and is director of the BerbeeWalsh Foundation, a family foundation dedicated to human and animal health and welfare.

UWRF graduates will find their own achievements, Walsh said. Their time and experiences as Falcons have set them up for success.

"As you leave for your future, I can't help but feel optimistic about the impact you will have on our society," she said. "We are in good hands."



Members of Kids From Wisconsin perform at the Wall Ampitheatre at UW-River Falls in July 2023. The group is scheduled to perform again on July 19 as one of six shows scheduled to be part of the Chill on the Hill Summer Concert Series. UWRF file photo.

Six performances scheduled for Summer Concert Series at UW-River Falls

Chill on the Hill shows include Kids From Wisconsin, other musical acts

River Falls, Wis. – Local bands and other shows, including the acclaimed Kids From Wisconsin, are scheduled to perform during this summer's free concert series at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Six shows are scheduled for the outdoor Wall Amphitheatre stage, 678 S. 3rd St., River Falls. All shows begin at 7 p.m.

- Tuesday, June 4 – Chastity Brown
- Thursday, June 20 – Community Art Base (CAB) presents: St. Croix Valley Community Band
- Friday, July 19 – Kids From Wisconsin
- Tuesday, July 30 – Ber, rock band
- Thursday, Aug. 1 – CAB presents: Annie Mack
- Thursday, Aug. 22 – CAB presents: Brotherhood of Birds

The Chill on the Hill Summer Concert Series was created to provide a welcoming, relaxed summer music experience on the UW-River Falls campus. New in 2024, Chill on the Hill is partnering with the CAB Music in the Park series to provide a new venue for three of their weekly musical acts.

The series is made possible thanks to support from the city of River Falls Municipal Utilities and the River Falls Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau. Special appreciation also goes to the UWRF partners in University Advancement, Career Services, Student Involvement and University Communications and Marketing who are providing additional resources in support of the series.

Grilled food, ice cream and beverages, including local beer and wine will be available for purchase at the concerts. Personal picnics and non-alcoholic beverages are allowed but carry-in alcoholic beverages are strictly prohibited. Concert guests are encouraged to experience the vibrant River Falls downtown for food and accommodations before and after the shows.

Smoking is prohibited and dogs must remain on leashes. In the event of inclement weather, the concerts will be moved indoors to various rain sites. Check the website for more information.

Beginning May 13, a section of 3rd Street from just south of the B Lot to the Agricultural Science building will be closed for the entire summer to allow work crews to complete utility work. People attending Chill on the Hill shows should take 6th Street as the main route to campus because of street construction.

For weather updates, more information or accommodations, call the campus Information Desk 715-425-3911, visit <https://www.uwrf.edu/community/summer-concert-series> or email elise.peters@uwrf.edu.



(Left to right) Assistant Professor of Dairy Processing Grace Lewis, Yihong Deng, CAFES Dean Michael Orth.

Students celebrate at CAFES Senior Supper

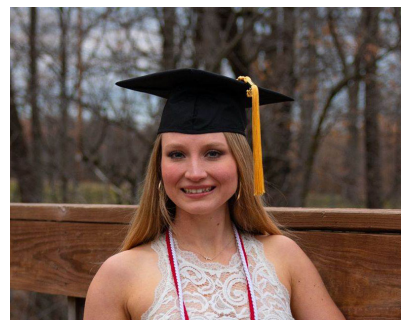
May 13, 2024 - For the 41st year, the Alumni Association of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls hosted a senior recognition event to celebrate the accomplishments of the graduating seniors and to welcome them into the alumni family.

The Senior Supper featured the traditional series of three speakers. Speaking on behalf of the alumni was Heidi Doering, '88, biological IPM consultant and technical sale representative with Koppert USA. Doering advised the seniors to be curious, noting how the field she currently works in, was not in existence when she was at UWRF.

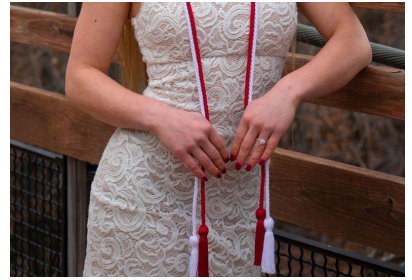
The graduating seniors were represented by Emma Nackers, an animal science-companion animal major from Land O'Lakes.

"Most of my biggest milestones during my time here at UWRF have been a result of what I like to call, 'sticking my nose in a potential opportunity'," Nackers said. She encouraged her peers to find ways to "stick your nose in potential opportunities" because it could lead to a place you never imagined.

The third speaker, on behalf of the faculty, was Brenda Boetel, agricultural economics professor, who encouraged the seniors to "keep calm and carry on" through all that is to come whether it be the need to learn new skills, allow for new ideas, getting through a financial setback, or failing and improving.



In between the speakers, the students graduating with Laude honors, those who maintained a minimum 3.7 GPA for their entire college career, were recognized and presented with the red and white cords they wore at commencement. CAFES Dean Michael Orth took a few minutes to recognize all the seniors for participating in so many activities outside of the classroom and congratulated them for their resiliency when the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the start of their college career.



Two seniors were honored with special awards. Yihong Deng, a senior in food science and technology from River Falls, was presented with the Dr. Earl Hildebrand Memorial Award which honors the graduating senior who best exemplifies a combination of scholastic achievement, extracurricular involvement and leadership roles in CAFES. Students are nominated by faculty and the recipient is selected by the CAFES Awards Committee.

“Yihong’s capacity to conduct research while achieving success in her academics and retaining involvement in a variety of teams and clubs is truly remarkable,” the nomination letter said, calling out her combination of talents. Deng worked on a research project investigating biodegradable packaging material for food products, with support from the Dairy Innovation Hub. She presented the results of that work in poster format at five different events, as an oral presentation at another, and is finishing a draft manuscript. Deng also worked on smaller research projects, participated on intercollegiate evaluation teams, and in the Food Science Club. She has accepted an offer from Cornell University and will be pursuing her Ph.D. in food science in the fall.

The Seymour Junkman Award for the graduating senior in 2023-24 with the highest GPA went to Amanda Stone, a dairy science major from Larsen. Stone graduated in December and is working at Olson Farms, Larsen. She was active in the Dairy Club and on the Dairy Judging Team during her time at UWRF.

Inset photo: Amanda Stone

Three faculty named Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars participants

Program members collaborate on effective approaches to student learning

May 28, 2024 - Three University of Wisconsin-River Falls faculty have been selected as 2024-25 Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars, a recognition of their teaching excellence and their desire to focus on new, innovative approaches to educate students.

Cera Babb, of Hudson, director of choral activities and assistant professor of music; Abigail Jackson, of St. Paul, Minn., assistant professor of psychological sciences; and Carlos Rojas, of Hudson, assistant professor of Spanish, were chosen for the honor by the Universities of Wisconsin. They are among 26 participants chosen from the UW's 11 comprehensive universities and UW-Milwaukee.

Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars (WTFS) must demonstrate excellent teaching skills and have a curiosity about student learning to be nominated by provosts at their universities and be chosen for the program. The one-year program begins in late May and culminates with a research presentation at the annual Spring Conference on Teaching and Learning in April 2025.



Babb's project will investigate the impact of using tuning forks in a choral setting and whether they could provide students with more control over their music. Jackson will evaluate different learning assessment techniques that are the best measure of student learning, while Rojas will study the intersection between language acquisition and technology and the effects of language classroom interaction in the creation of social networks and community belonging.

Through WTFS, participants collaborate with other exceptional teachers from across the Universities of Wisconsin and from across various disciplines. They will discuss effective evidence-based teaching and learning approaches while also being guided through research focused on improving student learning.

Research on the WTFS program shows that it enables participants to move from a focus on teaching to a focus on student learning. This happens through a supportive peer network and under the direction and guidance of two co-directors who work for the Office of Professional and Instructional Development (OPID). OPID supports the UW's 13 Centers for Teaching and Learning to foster a culture of teaching and learning excellence in Wisconsin.

The WTFS program is "the most valuable teaching development program available to UWRF instructors at this time," said Cyndi Kernahan, professor of psychological sciences at UWRF and director of the UWRF Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. By working with instructors who come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, career stages, and university types, participants can better examine student learning and develop improved practices to ensure their students learning, Kernahan said.



“The collaboration the participants enjoy allows for networking and idea sharing that often results in truly innovative new teaching practices and research collaborations that often lead to both presentations and publications,” she said.



Headshots:

Babb

Jackson

Rojas

Two faculty members honored for their work with students

David Bonko, Chris Hergenrader lauded for their commitment to helping students succeed

May 17, 2024 - University of Wisconsin-River Falls faculty members David Bonko and Chris Hergenrader are being honored for their outstanding work with students and helping prepare them for success after graduation.

David Bonko, associate marketing communications professor at UW-River Falls for the past 26 years, is being honored with the 2024 Distinguished Teaching Award. Chris Hergenrader, assistant animal science professor for the past four years, has been named the 2024 Adviser of the Year.



Bonko said he is “quite honored and humbled” to receive the Distinguished Teaching Award, the highest honor a faculty member can receive on campus. The award was established in 1965 to recognize teaching excellence.

Bonko credits his students for their hard work and commitment to create high-level marketing and communications campaigns. Over the years his students have raised more than \$60,000 for nonprofits by planning and putting on fundraising events for those organizations.

“These kids work so hard to do good for this world,” Bonko said. “You’re trying to encourage the next generation of community volunteers, and I’m lucky that I get to be a part of doing that.”

Those campaigns are an example of Bonko’s focus on experiential learning in which students learn best by doing. He said his curriculum is adaptable and he allows his students to have input on their classroom plans.

“I believe if a student trusts you, they’ll learn from you. Trust creates a mutually beneficial relationship where both the instructor and student do not want to disappoint each other,” he said.

Similarly, Hergenrader said he focuses on getting to know his students which allows him to better help them create academic plans that enable them to have the most success. Each of those plans should be tailored to individual student personalities, strengths and needs, he said.



“You truly do need to get to know your students. Every one of their paths looks different,” Hergenrader said. “Some of them come from a farm, some from a metro area. Some are strong in academics, some struggle. No two students are the same. If you get to know them personally, you can help them individualize a path that allows them to find success.”

Hergenrader’s students said he is deserving of the Adviser of the Year award, established in 2000 to recognize excellence in advising undergraduates. They describe him as especially kind and exceedingly committed to helping them find their best academic path. They credit him for expanding opportunities in the companion animal program he oversees, providing them with additional employment opportunities after they graduate.

"I have never had an adviser care so deeply about my success," Chesney Eschbach, a sophomore from Decatur, Ill, majoring in animal science, said of Hergenrader. "He meets with me as soon as he can and takes my feelings into consideration regarding classes. He encourages me to push myself and believes in me when I don't believe in myself."

Bonko's students praised his dedication to them as well. Former UW-River Falls student Luke Affolter had Bonko as an adviser from 2009-13. He credits Bonko with providing him with the skills needed to thrive in the professional world.

"He is engaging in class and makes learning fun while still making sure we learned what we needed to learn," Affolter said of Bonko. "He is, without a doubt, a shining star at UWRF."

Hergenrader and Bonko said they're motivated by the students they work with and are committed to helping them succeed. They said they feel lucky to have jobs educating students.

"You do it to help the students," Hergenrader said. "You try to go the extra mile for them. It's about doing the absolute best that I can for students, to give them the opportunities that they need and want."

Photos:

Top: David Bonko headshot

Bottom: Chris Hergenrader headshot



New Richmond High School agriscience teacher Rachel Sauvola shovels corn from a gravity box as she instructs students, from left, Michael Mast, Jazzmira Traynor and Melany Rodriguez how to remove corn to be fed to animals at the school-operated farm that Sauvola began and oversees. Sauvola, a 1999 UW-River Falls graduate, was recently recognized for her teaching expertise by being named a 2025 Wisconsin Teacher of the Year. UWRF photo.

UWRF alum/New Richmond teacher named Wisconsin Teacher of the Year

Educator noted for her inspired education methods, development of school farm

May 28, 2024 - Whether developing a new program to produce beef for school lunch or training agriculture teachers across the nation to better instruct their students, Rachel Sauvola comes up with innovative ways to convey knowledge, a process she credits in part to her time as a student at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Sauvola, an agriscience teacher and a [National FFA Organization](#) adviser at New Richmond High School (NRHS), is being recognized for her educational expertise. She was recently named one of five educators statewide as a [2025 Wisconsin Teacher of the Year](#). She graduated from UW-River Falls in 1999 with a bachelor's degree in agricultural education.

During her time at the university, Sauvola, of New Richmond, said she learned from numerous faculty role models who stressed the value of a quality curriculum and promoted her to think outside the box and come up with new ideas. Those learning experiences served as a starting point for the work she has accomplished with students since, she said.

"I had the opportunity to interact with and learn from high-caliber faculty and take part in programs on campus that helped me

gain new skills and built my confidence,” Sauvola said of UWRF on a recent morning while helping her high school students sort plants grown in the school greenhouse. “It’s that learning and those programs that I have used as a foundation to emulate and give valuable learning experiences to my students.”

Educators earning the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year title were chosen by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in recognition of Teacher Appreciation Week. Sauvola and others were chosen for their dedication to education and for how they positively impact students.

In addition to teaching and running the school FFA program, Sauvola serves as a mentor facilitator for the National Association of Agricultural Educators. In that position, she trains agriculture teachers across the U.S. to develop inquiry-based instruction models for their students. She teaches a wide range of courses on such topics as greenhouse management, veterinary science and a course titled “plants, animals, pizza and more” in which students study agriculture careers and topics such as supply chain issues.

Jill Underly, state superintendent of DPI, visited Sauvola and other award winners at their schools to notify them they had been chosen for the prestigious award. She credited them for their exemplary dedication to their students.

“This group of educators are a tremendous source of inspiration to their students, their schools, and everyone across Wisconsin,” Underly said. “They go above and beyond to support students in many unique ways, providing a safe, inclusive environment for kids to unlock their potential and grow as individuals.”

Sauvola is being recognized in part for her developing the Students Opportunities with Agriculture Resources (SOAR) Educational Center at her school, a school farm through which students provide beef for the school lunch program and learn hands-on farming skills. The farm is home to animals such as chickens, ducks, goats, and beef cattle. It is the only school-operated farm in Wisconsin that is a fully functioning, seven-day-a-week operation.

The farm provides students with many opportunities to learn about caring properly for animals and how quality animal care leads to better food, Sauvola said.

“This is really about providing our students with hands-on opportunities they need to learn most effectively,” Sauvola said. “With the work they do here, they can build a really strong resume and be the ones who are offered the jobs and educational opportunities they are looking for. That is what I want to do for them.”

The school farm not only connects students with agricultural issues, but community members as well. Many local residents volunteer at the farm, Sauvola said, and she partners with community businesses and farmers who donate their time and talents to SOAR. She said working with businesses is one way to introduce her students to the wide variety of agriculture jobs they can work in.

“I can’t run this farm by myself,” Sauvola said. “It only works if I have community members and students who are willing to be a part of it. And luckily for me, that is the case.”

Among volunteers who help at the farm are Eli Bell and his family. A 16-year-old sophomore at NRHS, Bell is involved in the school’s FFA program and worked this school year with Sauvola on an effort to grow goldfish. He researched how to best care for the fish but encountered multiple challenges that included obtaining a new pump to properly oxygenate and filter

water.

Throughout the learning process, Bell said, Sauvola pushed him to think creatively to find solutions. He spoke about Sauvola Thursday while helping other students and volunteers move plants from the school's greenhouse to other summertime locations.

"She is really good at connecting with students," Bell said, "and then she pushes us to get uncomfortable. She is good at helping us think through issues to come up with solutions. And she convinces us to do things that we didn't know we could do. She believes in us."

Later that day Sauvola worked with students at the SOAR farm. She showed one group of students how to empty corn from a gravity box into buckets before it was fed to animals. Moments later she conferred with a volunteer farm worker about how to more efficiently water animals. Next, she gave directions to volunteers about specific animal feedings.

A short time later, Sauvola helped NRHS students Jaxon Becklin and Kyle Alexander haul boards that had been used for an animal pen from one site to another. The students praised Sauvola's organizational ability and her high-energy approach.

"She is a really good motivator," Becklin said. "She is really good at inspiring others to want to do this work. Part of her instruction is through hands-on learning and that is how I learn best."

Given that "there are so many teachers across Wisconsin doing amazing things with their students," Sauvola said she is humbled to receive the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year honor. She is grateful for the many opportunities she has been provided during her teaching career. But she remains focused on the future, how she can continue to connect her students to learning in meaningful ways.

"If I can create opportunities for my students, opportunities that help them not only learn but get them to where they want to go in life, that is what I really want to do," she said.

UW-River Falls to honor outstanding alums, special contributor

Annual Evening of Excellence set for May 3

May 1, 2024 -- Four University of Wisconsin-River Falls alums and a long-time supporter of the university will be honored at the UWRF Evening of Excellence, Friday, May 3, in the Riverview Ballroom of the University Center. The event begins at 5:30 p.m.

"As we begin our year-long commemoration of UWRF's 150th year, it seems even more meaningful to honor this year's awards recipients who have carried on the Falcon tradition of making a profound difference in the world," said UWRF Chancellor Maria Gallo. "Their many accomplishments prove yet again how the foundation of a UWRF education provides opportunities that lead to limitless achievements."

The UWRF Alumni Association will present four awards: Distinguished Alumni, Lifetime Achievement, Outstanding Young Alum and Outstanding Service.

Distinguished Alumni Award

Entrepreneurs. Innovators. Philanthropists. Jeff and Kristi Cernohous of River Falls have, together, established an impressive record of noteworthy career and life accomplishments.

After starting his career at 3M, Jeff founded Interfacial Solutions (IFS) in his garage. He grew the company significantly until 2014 when IFS was purchased by Stratasys, Ltd. He remained as general manager, developing new technologies related to materials science for the 3D printing market. Jeff founded Magna Flooring in 2012 and Interfacial Consultants (IFC) in 2016. In 2020, Nagase acquired controlling interest in IFC. Jeff is now IFC's minority partner and chief operating officer as well as chief innovation officer for Nagase America. IFC employs more than 80 people and operates five facilities in western Wisconsin.



Jeff is an award-winning, innovative leader in sustainable materials, additive manufacturing, advanced composite and specialty additives. He is co-author of more than 50 scientific publications and 100 U.S. patents and patent applications. His patents have generated more than \$5 billion of commercial product value for his companies Interfacial Solutions (IFS), Interfacial Consultants (IFC) and their customers.

Jeff earned a chemistry degree from UWRF in 1993 and went on to receive his Ph.D. in organic chemistry from the University of Minnesota in 1997.

Jeff has served on many boards, including the UWRF Foundation Board of Directors, the UWRF Chancellor's Advisory

Council, UW-Stout People Process Culture, UW-Eau Claire Materials Science Advisory Committee and multiple start-up/for profit companies. He also has also served as a UWRF lecturer, teaching a class on innovation and entrepreneurship in science.

Kristi Cernohous started her career in quality assurance at General Mills in 1993 where she was part of a team responsible for auditing third-party licensors and contract manufacturers using the Betty Crocker brand. She later served as a forensic scientist for the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. She specialized in trace evidence analysis and was involved in several high-profile criminal cases. In 2007, Kristi joined husband Jeff and created critical structure and process to his rapidly growing businesses. She served as vice president of quality and characterization for both Interfacial Solutions and Interfacial Consultants.

The couple were leading advocates for UWRF's Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) and have contributed \$1.25 million for the transformational project, which began construction in 2023.

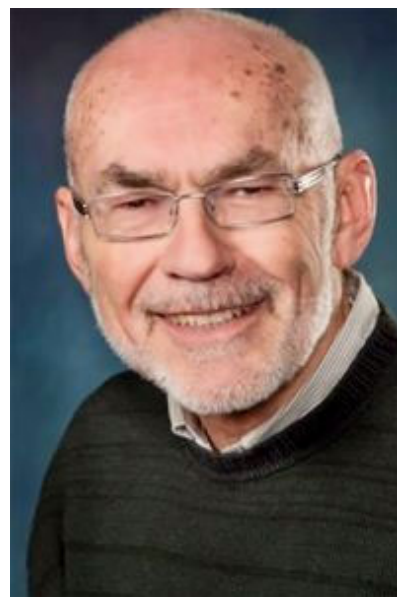
Jeff and Kristi have three children and three grandchildren. They grew up in rural River Falls and continue to live here.

Lifetime Achievement Award

Gary Wagenbach, who earned a UWRF degree in biology and chemistry in 1962, went on to a long and accomplished career in education and research.

Wagenbach grew up in Barron, where he was captain of the 1957 Golden Bears football team. After graduation from UWRF, Wagenbach went on to earn his master's degree and Ph.D. in zoology from UW-Madison. He also served in research positions at the University of Washington, Bermuda Biological Station, the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Mass., and the University of Hawaii.

Over a remarkable 39-year career at Carleton College in Northfield, Minn., Wagenbach served as the Winifred and Atherton Bean Professor of Biology, Science, Technology and Society and now holds emeritus status. He strongly encouraged faculty/student collaborative research and taught a variety of courses including off-campus research programs and environmental studies. He also served as the director of environmental and technology studies.



As an invertebrate zoologist, Wagenbach worked on the population of threatened freshwater mussels in regional rivers. He is the author of numerous research articles and has inspired generations of Carleton students who have gone on to notable careers in research and higher education. After retirement, he provided teacher professional development for Lumbini Academy, a K-12 school in Yangon, Myanmar. Wagenbach also teaches courses in the Master Naturalists Program and for the Cannon Valley Elder Collegium.

Wagenbach has been active in his community, serving as board member and officer of the Valley Grove Minnesota Preservation Society, a project manager for the society's oak savanna restoration and an elected supervisor for the Rice County Soil and Water Conservation District. His military service includes five years with the Army Reserves 82nd Engineers at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

Gary and his wife, Linda, also a UWRF alum, live in Nerstrand, Minn.

Outstanding Young Alum Award

Elizabeth Byers has demonstrated a passion for student development, academic excellence, and the dairy community. She earned her UWRF bachelor's degree in marketing in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences. She went on to earn her master's degree in education from UW-La Crosse.

Byers began her student affairs career at UWRF when she served as the career services career fair coordinator. Her time as a Chancellor's Student Ambassador, member of the Dairy Judging Team, and her term as Alpha Sigma Alpha's president had a significant influence on her career trajectory.

Byers is now the assistant director of academic excellence and transformational education in the College of Agriculture at Purdue University. She implements events and programs to enhance student's growth in the areas of undergraduate research, issues engagement, academic excellence, and leadership. Byers also collects and analyzes data on senior's transformational experiences and manages various endowments to maximize investment returns while staying fiscally responsible.

She previously served as both a senior academic and career advisor and a student services specialist within the College of Agriculture at Purdue. In these roles, she organized numerous networking events, seminars, and industry tours to enhance students' professional skills and career understanding.

Byers has taught seminars for honors students and led study abroad trips to Haiti, Costa Rica, and Iceland. She advises the Purdue Agricultural Council and continues to meet up with students and alumni whenever they are on campus.

Byers is engaged in her community, serving as dairy superintendent for Tippecanoe County 4-H and as a member of the Tippecanoe County Extension Board. Additionally, she is the dairy judging coach for the local 4H team and volunteers with various 4H initiatives across the state.

Byers has received several awards, including Outstanding Club Advisor in Purdue's College of Agriculture, Outstanding New Professional through the Purdue Advising Association, and the Chancellor's Award for Excellence as an undergraduate at University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Outstanding Service Award

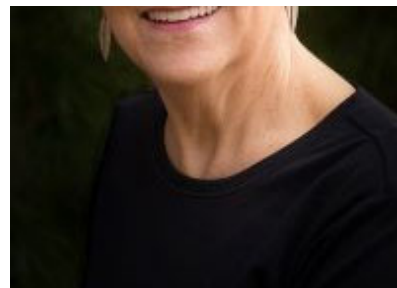
Linda Yde of River Falls is an accomplished health care professional, community leader, tireless volunteer and UW-River Falls supporter and advocate.

After retiring from Regions Hospital where she served as a trauma program coordinator, Yde immediately became involved with the River Falls Rotary Club as a rotary reader, helping scores of elementary school students with their reading at Rocky Branch, Greenwood and Montessori schools. During winter months, Yde volunteers in the first



grade classroom at Nancy Lopez Elementary School in Roswell, N.M.

Yde is now president of the River Falls Rotary Club and has led a successful diaper and baby wipes drive and spearheads the book giveaway for the yearly Tools for School program. She also chairs the Fifth Tuesday Committee which undertakes projects for students in the River Falls School District, UWRF, Chippewa Valley Technical College and community non-profit organizations such as Our Neighbor's Place.



As for her UWRF support, Yde, originally from Shawano, has served an integral role in the reinstatement of UWRF's marching band program. She provides important assistance to Director Tom Barnett with the Marching Falcons band camp by planning activities, meals and snacks for band members during their week-long training. Yde has also established three student scholarship funds at UWRF.

Until an unfortunate rib fracture, she was a member of the UWRF Pep Band, the St. Croix Valley Community Band and the Roswell, N.M., Community Band. Because she is no longer able to play trombone, she has turned her attention to piano and ukelele.

Weyer awarded inaugural Janty mathematics scholarship

May 14, 2024 - Lezlie Ann Marie Weyer, a senior mathematics education major at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls has been awarded the John Janty Memorial Scholarship for 2024 from the Wisconsin Mathematics Council, the Wisconsin Mathematics Education Foundation and the Madison Community Foundation.

Weyer, of Baldwin, was awarded the inaugural John Janty Memorial Scholarship at the Wisconsin Mathematics Council Celebration Banquet Event in Green Lake on May 1. She is the vice-president of the Mathematics Education Club at UWRF and will be student teaching at New Richmond Middle School and high school in the fall.

John's widow, Sue, presented the award to Weyer. Sue shared about Weyer's passion for working with all students and her belief that they can all succeed with mathematics.



Weyer is the sixth UW-River Falls math apprentice to receive an award through the Wisconsin Mathematics Council and the Wisconsin Mathematics Education Foundation since 2016. In addition to receiving the award at the conference, Weyer also conducted a one-hour event with two of her colleagues on developing mathematics education clubs.

"Our motto in the program is Learning by Doing. Over the last year working with Lezlie during her apprenticeship, I've seen her confidence grow through all of the teaching experiences she has had. She is well prepared with all her knowledge of best teaching practices and has all the tools to be a great math teacher as she moves forward into career. It is gratifying to see all her hard work from the last year be honored with this prestigious award," said Mathematics Professor Erick Hofacker, the undergraduate and graduate mathematics education program director, and Weyer's adviser.

In her preparation to become a teacher, Weyer had an epiphany. When she got to college, she realized that while she had mastered the procedures of mathematics, she did not understand mathematical concepts. She now plans to focus on teaching students to understand mathematical concepts, not just to execute mathematical procedures.

"John Janty valued understanding in mathematics so I'm beyond honored to receive this award since understanding has become very important to me as well," Weyer said. "This scholarship will help fund my semester of student teaching so I can continue to learn and teach for understanding."

John was an exceptional mathematics teacher at Waunakee High School and a leader in mathematics education in Wisconsin. He was president of the Wisconsin Mathematics Council, recipient of its Distinguished Mathematics Educator Award, and chair of the Wisconsin Mathematics Education Foundation. He believed that all students can learn mathematics with understanding including those who struggle with mastery and that an effective teacher is crucial in helping each student attain understanding.

The UW-River Falls Mathematics Education Program prepares students to become successful future middle school and high school mathematics teachers through a unique two-semester apprenticeship model. For more information about the program, visit <https://www.uwrf.edu/MATH/Mathematics-Education-Undergraduate-Program.cfm>

Photo: *Lezlie Weyer (left) with her mother Jessica Weyer. Lezlie, a senior mathematics education major at UW-River Falls was recently awarded the John Janty Memorial Scholarship for 2024 from the Wisconsin Mathematics Council, the Wisconsin Mathematics Education Foundation and the Madison Community Foundation.*



Susanne Wiesner, assistant professor of environmental science at UW-River Falls, and her team monitor soil greenhouse gas emission and carbon uptake at UWRF's Mann Valley Farm. UWRF photo.

Four CAFES faculty awarded research fellowships

Their work will boost research through the Dairy Innovation Hub

June 11, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) recently awarded four faculty research fellowships to help increase dairy-related research capacity through the Dairy Innovation Hub initiative.

Those chosen for the fellowships are Assistant Professor of Animal and Food Science Grace Lewis of Hastings, Minn.; Associate Professor of Plant and Earth Science Jill Coleman Wasik of Cologne, Minn.; Assistant Professor of Environmental Science Susanne Wiesner of Hastings, Minn.; and Associate Professor of Agricultural Engineering Technology Youngmi Kim of Stillwater, Minn.

They will tackle research projects in the hub's four priority areas: stewarding land and water resources, enriching human health and nutrition, ensuring animal health and welfare, and growing farm business and communities.

Funded through a \$7.8 million annual investment by the state of Wisconsin, the hub combines research and development at UW-Madison, UW-Platteville, and UW-River Falls campuses to keep Wisconsin's \$45.6 billion dairy community at the global forefront in producing nutritious dairy foods in an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable manner. Since its

launch in 2019, the hub has funded more than 220 projects across the three campuses.

A faculty research fellowship is a temporary position for permanent faculty members. The goal is to provide support for a specific research project and any ancillary costs, including ensuring that faculty have time to conduct research and providing support for existing teaching responsibilities.

The four faculty research projects are:

- Lewis specializes in dairy processing. Her position is funded by the Dairy Innovation Hub. Her project, “Processing-induced alterations in casein protein digestibility and enzymatic interactions,” aims to evaluate how changes to casein protein structure could increase the digestion rate of dairy foods and make improvements to protein bioavailability for people such as athletes, infants, and others.
- Coleman Wasik’s work focuses on understanding how human activities benefit from natural processes while lessening their impacts on natural systems. Her project, “Growing a new UW collaboration to continuously measure groundwater nitrate in Western Wisconsin farm wells using a novel sensor technology,” leverages a unique partnership between UW-River Falls and UW-Madison, alongside the farmer-led Western Wisconsin Conservation Council (WWCC), to improve understanding of how nitrate concentrations fluctuate in wells in response to factors such as rain events and nutrient management practices.
- Wiesner’s research includes agricultural atmospheric science and climate resiliency, land-atmosphere interactions, remote sensing, and ecosystem management. Wiesner’s position is funded by the Dairy Innovation Hub. Her project, “Filling existing gaps in the monitoring of soil greenhouse gas emissions and environmental health at Mann Valley Farm,” aims to improve soil GHG emission and carbon uptake monitoring at the UW-River Falls Mann Valley Farm, and to detangle the complex interactions between land use management, vegetation type and physiology, and soil characteristics.
- Kim’s research studies food process engineering, renewable energy, and bioprocess engineering. Her project, “Development of whey protein-lignin based film/coating materials for dairy food packaging applications,” builds on previous research that developed a whey protein-lignin based packaging material but will explore additional chemical processes that will hopefully improve the film’s strength and water barrier properties.

Music program honored with national finalist recognition

Four university choral ensembles, one band chosen by The American Prize

June 11, 2024 - Four University of Wisconsin-River Falls choral ensembles and one university band have been selected as finalists for a prestigious national honor.

Four different choral groups led by UW-River Falls Director of Choral Activities Cera Babb, of Hudson, have been chosen as national finalists for The American Prize in Choral Performance. The four ensembles named as national finalists are the university's Chamber Singers, Concert Choir, Tenor/Bass Ensemble, and the Treble Choir.



In addition, the University Band at UW-River Falls, led by Band Director Gary Bird, of Hudson, was recognized for its musicianship by being selected as a national finalist for the American Prize in Band/Wind Ensemble Performance.

The ensembles and band submitted recordings to The American Prize that were judged against other submittals from across the country. The American Prize calls itself "...the nation's most comprehensive series of contests in the classical arts...designed to evaluate, recognize and reward the best performers, ensembles, composers, directors and administrators in the United States, based on submitted recordings."

Babb and Bird said they're honored by the recognition by The American Prize. The distinction reflects the talent of UW-River Falls music students and their dedication toward performing and creating high-quality music, they said.

"The UWRF choirs have been working diligently and I am thrilled they are being recognized for their music," Babb said. "I look forward to seeing where their continued growth will take them in the coming years."

Paul Budde, chair of the UWRF Music and Stage and Screen Arts Department, said the finalist recognition by The American Prize for the UW-River Falls music program is "a great honor" that reflects its high-caliber music instruction and performance.

"This speaks to the dedication and musicianship of our students, as well as the outstanding leadership of ensemble leaders Dr. Cera Babb (choir) and Dr. Gary Bird (band)," Budde said.



Photos:

Top: Cera Babb

Bottom: Gary Bird

Paying it forward: Award recipients' research benefits students and beyond

3D artificial tissue design, gold nanoparticles, environmental justice among projects made possible

June 24, 2024 - University of Wisconsin-River Falls faculty members who received grant awards for the 2023-24 school year have used that funding for innovative research projects that are furthering product development and have created high-impact student learning opportunities.

Faculty initiatives have included such projects as launching a rocket to take images of the ground below, creating gold nanoparticles, developing environmental justice practices, devising a video game music curriculum, and others.

Those efforts were made possible by the Paul B. and Robert Dykstra Faculty Excellence Award, the Keith Wurtz Award for Teaching Excellence, and the Manley Olson Instructional Academic Staff Professional Development Award. UWRF faculty were chosen for the awards based on research proposals and innovative teaching methods. The awards were announced in August 2023.

The following faculty members were selected to conduct research through those grant award programs:

Paul B. and Robert Dykstra Faculty Excellence Award

Michelle DeBoer, animal science associate professor, said the award enabled her to continue research on best methods for winter blanketing on horses. Her work involved evaluating temperature and humidity under winter horse blankets in various weather conditions. She said her study allows her to provide better blanketing recommendations for horse owners.

"Considering funding for horse-specific research is very difficult to find, the support I received to get this work done has been extremely meaningful to me," DeBoer, of Roberts, said. "Additionally, this research is very exciting and has received a lot of attention in the equine community."

Physics Department Chair Glenn Spiczak said receiving the Dykstra award allowed him to work with students to successfully launch a rocket used for ground imaging. The rocket was designed, built, and tested for this year's 2024 NASA Collegiate Rocket Launch competition.

"Your generosity enabled me to fund my continued engagement with students in research and in the classroom," Spiczak, of River Falls, wrote in a thank you letter to donor Paul Dykstra. "Thank you for your ongoing support of faculty excellence at UWRF. It is heartening to see individuals like you making a difference in so many ways!"

Funding through the Dykstra award allowed Sam Alvarado, inorganic chemistry associate professor, to purchase chemicals to make gold nanoparticles. He worked with a student to image those nanoparticles with a scanning electron microscope, with the goal of linking them together to make a film that can be studied for its electrical properties. In addition, Alvarado, of River Falls, used funding to purchase a new microwave reactor for the Chemistry Department which will facilitate a variety of

research efforts.

"This award has helped me to develop my own research plans as well as find new ways to collaborate," he said, "and I anticipate that the chemicals and equipment that I have purchased will lead to new discoveries on the UWRF campus."

Keith Wurtz Award for Teaching Excellence

Shawyn Domyancich-Lee, social work associate professor, expressed gratitude for being selected as a Wurtz award recipient. The program allowed Domyancich-Lee, of New Hope, Minn., to continue to develop a teaching method that incorporates environmental justice and sustainability into existing social work courses and to develop new environmental justice classwork. Award funding also enabled Domyancich-Lee to increase teaching resources, attend trainings and conferences, and build community partnerships with environmental organizations that will benefit students.

"Caring for the environment is a personal passion and I have been very fortunate to have the support of faculty and staff to incorporate that into my work," Domyancich-Lee said.

Through the Wurtz award, Rebecca Haley, assistant chemistry professor, was able to analyze the effectiveness of oral exams on the confidence of her chemistry students. That work, she said, helped boost students' confidence and reduced their anxiety. She also used award funding to create new lecture videos for her organic chemistry students.

"Receiving this award has profoundly impacted my professional development," Haley, of Maplewood, Minn., wrote in a message to donors. "Thank you so much for supporting trailblazing efforts in the classroom."

Timothy Lyden, anatomy and physiology professor and director of the UWRF Tissue and Cellular Innovation Center, used Wurtz award funding to support development of 3D bioprinting to custom design artificial tissues to study disease and normal development processes. Using award dollars, Lyden, of Spring Valley, purchased a 3D bioprinter that will allow for greater cutting-edge research and collaboration.

"The impact of this award has already been immeasurable and will continue into the future for my teaching, research and collaboration efforts and for the students associated with each of these," he wrote in a message thanking donors.

Manley Olson Instructional Academic Staff Professional Development Award

Funding made possible by the Manley Olson Award furthered the creation of a new video game music course to be offered at UW-River Falls. The funds paid for Music Lecturer Casey Palbicki and two of his music composition students, to travel to [GameSoundCon](#), the world's largest game audio convention, to study technologies used to create video game music. They met and learned from some of the genre's biggest names.

"My trip to GameSoundCon was a great success!" Palbicki, of River Falls, wrote to donors. "I plan to make this trip to GameSoundCon an annual event for UWRF students."



Kurt Vogel, UW-River Falls professor of animal welfare and behavior and director of the Humane Handling Institute, speaks with meat industry employees during a training session on effective and humane restraint and stunning of animals at the university's Mann Valley Farm in November 2023. The Rosen Family Foundation, Inc. has given a \$1 million gift to support the Humane Handling Institute. UWRF photo.

UWRF's Humane Handling Institute secures \$1 million gift from Rosen Family Foundation, Inc.

Investment endorses institute's innovative, impactful animal welfare initiatives

June 13, 2024- The Rosen Family Foundation, Inc. has announced a \$1 million gift in support of the internationally recognized Humane Handling Institute at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

The transformational gift to the UW-River Falls Foundation establishes the largest program endowment in the university's history: The Rosen Family Humane Handling Institute Endowment.

"The Rosen Family Foundation is pleased to support UWRF's Humane Handling Institute, acknowledging its pivotal role in providing education in humane livestock handling and stunning for meat industry personnel," said a Rosen Family Foundation, Inc. representative. "Recognizing the importance of humane and safe practices to animal welfare, worker safety, and the mental and physical well-being of meat industry workers, is commendable, vital, and consistent with our mission to promote and enhance the quality of life in the communities we serve."

Kurt Vogel, UWRF professor of animal welfare and behavior and director of the Humane Handling Institute, and Ashlynn Kirk, program manager, expressed deep appreciation to the Rosen Family Foundation, Inc.

“The Rosen Family Foundation’s remarkable and generous investment ensures long-term viability for the institute, in turn amplifying the development and adoption of innovative technologies and techniques in animal handling, stunning, and research for the industry,” Kirk said.

Findings from research projects completed by undergraduate and graduate students at the UWRF Animal Welfare Lab, founded by Vogel, shed a light on the industry need.

“By tracking humane handling enforcement actions issued by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), we consistently identified stunning as a critical area of need for additional training and development,” Vogel said. “This initiative grew into the Humane Handling Institute and our mission to advance animal welfare and worker health and safety in this critical step in meat production.”

HHI is meeting a real and critical need in the meat industry, while preparing students and workers with the skills and training they need to become the next generation of industry leaders.

“We are grateful for the transformational support of the Rosen Family Foundation that establishes UWRF’s largest program endowment,” said UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo. “This commitment is an impactful endorsement of UWRF’s humane handling advancements and strengthens the university’s reputation as a champion for meeting real-world needs while offering students exposure to the ways that industry relationships are made and problems are solved.”

About the UWRF Humane Handling Institute

Through education, research and outreach, the UW-River Falls Humane Handling Institute is strengthening the skill level of meat industry employees, improving animal welfare, and increasing consumer trust in meat processing establishments. The institute is internationally recognized for its hands-on training workshops for humane livestock handling, stunning, and equipment maintenance. For more information, visit [UWRF Humane Handling Institute](#).



Former UW-River Falls student CJ Sycks speaks with an onlooker during an event in 2022 at the university at which conservation and environmental planning students solicited ideas about planning issues facing the city of River Falls. The Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents has approved starting a new undergraduate community and environmental planning degree at UW-River Falls that will develop skills specific to urban planning. UWRF file photo.

UW-River Falls adds community and environmental planning degree

Program to begin this fall will teach skills needed for high-demand careers

June 10, 2024 - Students seeking to design communities now and into the future will have the opportunity to learn those important, in-demand skills at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls following the addition of an undergraduate community and environmental planning degree at the university.

The Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents voted Friday to add the new bachelor of science degree at UW-River Falls. The program will be offered as a major at the university beginning this fall.

UW-River Falls will be one of relatively few universities nationally, and the only Universities of Wisconsin school, to offer an undergraduate planning degree with a specific focus on urban planning. UWRF officials said the program will build on the university's existing conservation and environmental planning degree and will complement programs in the university's Plant and Earth Science Department.

The new degree is the result of a recommendation from the UWRF Plant and Earth Science Department to elevate the program, which will strengthen recruitment efforts. The degree will prepare students for careers in areas such as environmental planning, urban and regional planning, and public administration.

The new degree will provide clarification for students and their potential employers because it will focus on developing skills specific to urban planning, said Christopher Holtkamp, associate professor of conservation and environmental planning. Surveys show growing demand for jobs related to community planning.

"Among the benefits of the new degree will be to raise the profile of the program to attract more students to it," Holtkamp said. "We will be one of the few undergraduate planning programs available, which should generate interest."

Coursework will incorporate the skills taught in existing classes, such as public administration, public policy, and urban geography to broaden students' perspectives.

"This program will help us better serve students with an interest in planning and fill employment demand," said Holly Dolliver, professor of soil and geology science and chair of the Plant and Earth Science Department. "This new degree compliments the array of programs in the Plant and Earth Science Department and further strengthens the multidisciplinary training and experiences we provide students."

The community and environmental planning program will include study of sustainability measures as they relate to urban planning, Holtkamp said. Students will learn a holistic approach to sustainability and how communities can better address social, economic, and environmental challenges.

"Given that urban areas continue to grow and are facing increased challenges, the job for planners is increasingly important," Holtkamp said. "Well-trained planners can bring a holistic approach to addressing these issues, and our program will develop the skills needed for that career."

The new degree will build on UWRF's history of successfully preparing graduates for planning careers through an option in the university's existing conservation major, said Wes Chapin, interim provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs. The focus on a hands-on, experiential learning approach is especially effective at preparing program graduates who are high-quality employees, he said.

"The proposed community and environmental planning major builds on that option and will position UW-River Falls to fill a niche that is not available at other UW schools," Chapin said, noting that demand for planning graduates in Wisconsin and across the nation is strong.



WiSys President Arjun Sanga presents Grace Lewis, assistant professor of animal and food science at UW-River Falls, with the Carl E. Gulbrandson Innovator of the Year Award during a ceremony Thursday at UW-Superior. The award honors the research efforts of Lewis and five of her students. Contributed photo.

Faculty member, students lauded for research efforts

WiSys award recognizes work to develop multiple food products

July 26, 2024 - A University of Wisconsin-River Falls faculty member and five of her students are being recognized for their creative, award-winning research that has led to a pending patent for a tasty food product they created.

Grace Lewis, assistant professor of animal and food science, and students Yihong Deng, Ashley Gruman, Anna Lokken, Katherine Petersen, and Rafael Larosiliere received the Carl E. Gulbrandson Innovator of the Year Award during the WiSys SPARK Symposium at UW-Superior on Thursday. The award is given annually by [WiSys](#) to Universities of Wisconsin faculty, staff and students who have made exemplary contributions as innovators. It is named for the former managing director of the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation who supported WiSys.

Lewis and her students placed first at the [Dairy Management Inc. New Product Competition](#) in July 2023 for developing [RootCurd](#), a ginger-coagulated dairy product based on an ancient Chinese recipe that is 89% dairy and is designed to ease consumers' anxiety. RootCurd took many hours to develop and lots of trial and error to turn into its end product.

RootCurd contains 20 grams of dairy protein per serving. Ginger provides the product with its slightly spicy flavor; lavender helps reduce stress.

"I'm really proud of my students for working so hard to create a high-quality product," Lewis said. "Their effort shows that high-level research and hard work can make a positive impact on the dairy industry."

Lewis also is being recognized by WiSys for other research efforts. She has a pending patent for her work in conjunction with UW-Madison in which milk fat is used as intravenous nutrition for people who can't digest foods normally. Another of her projects that uses milk protein to enable better absorption of medicine and foods by humans has received accolades and could be adopted by the food and pharmaceutical sectors.

Lewis began work at UW-River Falls in 2021. Since then she has received numerous accolades and awards, including second prize for the prestigious IDF Professor Pavel Jelen Early Career Scientist Prize in 2023, funding for her work in the university's Dairy Innovation Hub, and a WiSys Ignite Grant for 2023-24.

When she was first contacted by WiSys officials about the Carl E. Gulbrandson Innovator of the Year Award, Lewis figured the organization was asking her to present again at its SPARK Symposium, which she has done in the past.

"Then they told me that me and my students were being honored with this (Gulbrandson) award," Lewis said. "I was surprised in a good way. I am very, very thankful."

Lewis' students were surprised and honored as well by the award saying the acknowledgement for their hard work is gratifying.

"I felt a lot of pride for myself, my teammates and Dr. Lewis," said Petersen, of Clear Lake, who graduated with a food science and technology degree in May 2023 and works in research, development and application for the food company Kerry Group. "It really means a lot to all of us to get this recognition."

As Anna Lokken and her classmates began research on RootCurd, they had no idea how the effort would develop and that their work would lead to winning a national competition and a pending patent.

"When we started this project, I don't think any of us thought it would take off the way it did," said Lokken, of Litchfield, Minn., who graduated in December 2023 with a food science and technology degree and now works as a research and regulatory affairs specialist at Anderson Chemical Company. "It's truly an honor to receive this award and continue to be recognized for all of the work we put into RootCurd."

Developing RootCurd into a tasty food that could be sold on a commercial level was anything but easy, students said. They spent countless hours devising more than 40 different versions of the product, a process that included plenty of trial and error.

When they entered the Dairy Management Inc. New Product Competition last summer with RootCurd, students had low expectations. They were surprised and proud when they won the national competition. Motivated by that experience, Lewis and her students decided to seek a patent for RootCurd and partnered with WiSys to do so.

"This group of students was so motivated and so much fun to work with too," Lewis said. "I hope winning this award will show them how gifted they really are."

Petersen said she wasn't sure at first she wanted to be part of the RootCurd team. Now she is so thankful that she was.

“It has opened up so many opportunities and allowed for so many different experiences,” she said. “You never know what can come from taking advantage of an opportunity that is presented to you.”

Kelm and Smith honored with excellence awards

Contributions include commitment to service and research

July 11, 2024 - Faculty members Steve Kelm and Hiawatha Smith are recipients of distinctive faculty awards by their colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

In recognition of his record of going above and beyond, Kelm, chair of the Animal and Food Science Department, is being recognized with the 2024 University Excellence Award in Service. Smith, associate professor of literacy education and one of the most prolific members of the university's Teacher Education Department, has been awarded the 2024 University Excellence Award in Research, Scholarly, and Creative Activity.

Both awards, presented for the second time in UWRF history, will be formally bestowed at the All-Campus Awards Reception in August that kicks off the 2024-25 academic year.

Service award

While serving as chief administrator for one of the largest departments on campus with about 800 students and more than 20 faculty and staff might seem like plenty of responsibility for one person, Kelm tackles many other challenges at the university.



The professor of animal and dairy science also teaches classes, advises dozens of students, participates in numerous university committees, coaches dairy cattle judging teams and serves as co-adviser of the UWRF Dairy Club, faculty liaison for the Dairy Innovation Hub and director of the Farm and Industry Short Course.

The service award is given annually to recognize a faculty member who has contributed extensive service to their department, college, university, community, and/or discipline. Service done without compensation is particularly valued for this award. The selection is determined in collaboration among the provost and deans from a group of college nominees. Each college nominates one candidate for the award annually based on their preferred process. Self-nominations are also allowed.

In a nomination letter, Michael Orth, dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences, called Kelm an "ideal candidate" for the award and pointed to his many areas of service outside of his teaching appointment over more than 25 years at UW-River Falls. Kelm has served as his department's chair from 2004-10, associate chair from 2010-21 and chair again since 2021.

"Being a department chair is a tough position," Orth wrote. "When you add everything else Steve does, I do wonder why he keeps going periodically. But with Steve, I believe serving is a core value that he lives out and has for over two decades."

Kelm said he doesn't necessarily strive to provide service to the university, but just serves as a function of how he believes his job should be done.

"Service is simply part of doing a good job in the position that you hold, regardless of the title or role," Kelm said. "I believe strongly in the mantra of 'leaders go first.' I am not going to ask others to do something that I would not be willing to do myself. If a task needs to be completed and I am in a position where it can be done by me, then I will step into the void."

A perfect example came in summer 2023 when the university's Mann Valley Farm faced a staffing shortage after losing a number of employees and seeing most student workers leave for the summer.

"As a testament to Steve's commitment to the dairy program, he actually worked in the dairy on the weekends to help relieve the burden," Orth wrote. "I am not sure how many faculty would do that."

Later, Kelm was involved in the restaffing process and helped get the dairy center operating much more smoothly.

"I am not sure how it would have survived without his help and wisdom," Orth wrote.

In a recommendation letter supporting Kelm, Dairy Science Professor Sylvia Kehoe indicated that Kelm has had "an immense impact on many of our alumni that are now working in the industry" through his work as department chair. Kehoe added that Kelm also has been a role model for her and many of her colleagues thanks to his leadership of the department through difficult times and transitions, including countless hours of service outside the traditional workday and on weekends.

On top of all his other duties, Kelm took on the unofficial role of director of the Farm and Industry Short Course last fall. When the course no longer was supported at UW-Madison, dairy farmers and industry professionals asked Kelm to move it to UWRF, prompting the course to move forward as the university applied for funding. When the state Legislature didn't approve the financial support, Kelm led the department in offering the program anyway because he felt so strongly about the dairy industry sector served by the course.

"To think that Dr. Kelm coordinated and managed all this while working full time as chair of a large department, taught his standard course load and still showed up for his family after work – this is an amazing amount of service for one person," Kehoe wrote.

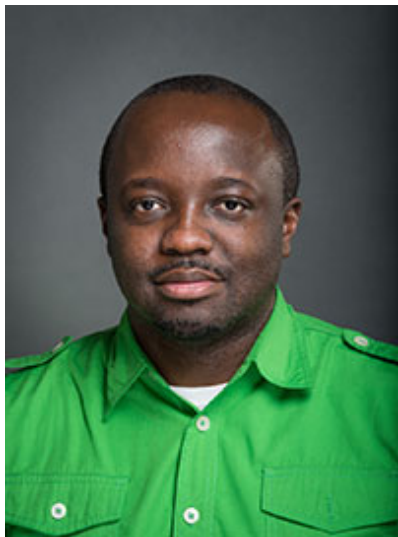
For his part, Kelm said he has been fortunate to have had individuals in his life that have led by example.

"Parents, colleagues, my spouse and mentors have demonstrated to me that service is rewarding, and it has become an expectation of myself," Kelm said. "My goal is to help others and to hopefully have an impact on others so that when they have the opportunity to serve, they take it on gladly. The load becomes much lighter when others are helping to finish a task."

Research award

For Smith, it's not enough just to teach future educators. He also devotes a large amount of his time and energy toward research and scholarly activity intended to help teachers be the best they can be.

Since joining UWRF in 2017, Smith has written multiple textbooks, book chapters and journal articles as well as presented at several education conferences.



The outstanding research award is given annually to recognize a faculty member that has made significant contributions to their field or fields of research, techniques, or creative expression. The selection is determined in collaboration among the provost and deans from a group of college nominees. Each college nominates one candidate for the award annually based on their preferred process. Self-nominations are also allowed.

Smith said he was surprised and excited to have his scholarly work recognized.

“As a recently tenured faculty member, this acknowledgment not only validates my dedication and effort, but also inspires me to continue pushing the boundaries of my scholarly work,” he said.

In the past year alone, Smith has been a co-author on six book chapters or textbooks (published or currently in-press) and three peer-reviewed journal publications and has presented at nine international, national or regional education meetings, according to a nomination letter written by Gregory Ruegsegger, assistant professor of health and human performance and chair of the College of Education, Business, and Allied Health’s Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activity Committee.

Ruegsegger noted that among Smith’s best work is his recently published textbook, “Beyond the Basics: Children’s Literature for the Elementary Teacher.” The book, which at the time of Smith’s nomination had been adopted by instructors in seven states, is a foundational text for undergraduate education majors in language arts and literacy and a professional development resource for practicing teachers. It features resources for immediate use by teachers in addition to addressing current hot-button topics related to teaching classic literature, controversial texts and genre study, Ruegsegger wrote.

“I am thrilled that our textbook has been adopted for university classes nationwide,” Smith said. “This textbook is a unique addition to the existing literature as it goes beyond basic content about children’s literature. It includes read-aloud lesson plans, guiding questions, discussion questions, extension activities, implications for practitioners and recommended texts for classrooms.”

Smith added that he is looking forward to the release of an edited text this fall that will support faculty success in higher education.

Ruegsegger indicated that Smith routinely collaborates with other UWRF faculty. In fact, three of his recent publications involved UWRF faculty as co-authors. The publications highlight how his broad expertise and scholarly interest can have an impact on the larger field of education, Ruegsegger wrote.

Smith co-authored “Integrating Social Studies Through the Read-Aloud” with Ad Hoc Instructor McKenzie Rabenn, a published chapter on preparing teacher candidates to teach developmental word study with former Associate Professor of

Literacy Education Amy Frederick, and another chapter on the connection between theory and practice in teaching in linguistically diverse settings with Frederick and Teacher Education Professor Dean Vesperman.

“With his colleagues, Dr. Smith has created many best practices used in teacher preparation programs,” wrote Ruegsegger, who characterized Smith as a “phenomenal scholar.”

Smith also has worked with several emerging scholars in the field, including mentoring and supporting numerous doctoral candidates and has served UWRF since 2018 as coordinator of the Master of Science-Elementary Education Program and in 2023-24 as interim coordinator of the Master of Science-Reading Program.

Genuine concern for the teaching profession motivates Smith in his pursuit of research and publishing opportunities.

“My scholarly activity,” Smith said, “allows me to explore impactful practices, disseminate new information and advocate for meaningful change within teaching and classroom spaces.”



Alan Symicek, UW-River Falls chief facilities officer, describes how construction is progressing on the university's Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) during a tour of the building Tuesday. Business and government leaders toured the three-story building, which is under construction and is scheduled to open in January 2026. UWRF photo.

Vision for the future: UW-River Falls hosts tour of Science and Technology Innovation Center

Building fostering collaboration between businesses and UWRF set to open in January 2026

July 30, 2024 - As she toured the partly-finished, much-anticipated Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Tuesday morning, Kristi Cernohous saw firsthand the transformational education building she and her husband Jeff were lead donors for three years ago moving closer to fruition.

"Wow. This is really cool," said Kristi, who along with her husband, is a UW-River Falls alum and recent recipients of the UWRF Distinguished Alumni Award. "In a way it seems so long ago that this building was in its planning stages. But now it's here. And it feels great to see it get to this point."

Kristi was among a group of people involved with SciTech who received their first tour of the three-story, 136,000 square-foot \$117 million science building construction. Work on it began 11 months ago and it is scheduled to open in January 2026. Funding for the building – the largest ever built at UW-River Falls – was approved by lawmakers as part of the 2021-23 state budget.

Business and government leaders touring SciTech offered similar reactions to that of Kristi. As they walked along cement floors with steel structures to the side and pipes and other infrastructure overhead, they envisioned what the building will look like when it's complete and learning spaces are inhabited by students and faculty collaborating with businesses.

Partnering with UW-River Falls and working with students provides a means of finding talented future employees with high-level job skills, said Mark Tyler, who founded and now chairs OEM Fabricators, a Woodville metal fabrication company. He supports SciTech and said it will significantly increase opportunities that will benefit businesses, the university, and the regional economy.

"We don't know what those specific opportunities are yet," he said. "But we know the foundation of what is being built. We've been strong advocates not because we know the opportunities, but because we know the foundation is there to go off in all kinds of different positive directions that will benefit this region in so many ways."

University and business leaders envision SciTech as so much more than a new science building. The facility is being built in such a way as to facilitate faculty and student engagement in state-of-the-art learning spaces with a focus on active learning.

SciTech will be the new home for physics, biology, chemistry and the psychological sciences, where students from a wide range of majors will engage in immersive high-impact learning experiences. UW-River Falls officials estimate more than 60% of UWRF students will take at least one class in SciTech.

SciTech will include a University and Business Collaboration Center that will facilitate collaborations between businesses and faculty and students. Faculty and students will partner with companies on research and other projects, providing students with high-level, hands-on learning opportunities and links to workplaces. Businesses will, in turn, benefit from student/faculty efforts and can provide training to future employees.

"This isn't your average classroom kind of a building," Chancellor Maria Gallo said. "It's lab spaces and areas for experiential learning and collaboration. We're excited about what SciTech means to the future of UWRF and the entire region."

Beth Schommer, chief of staff at UW-River Falls who will oversee the University and Business Collaboration Center, recalls the countless meetings planning SciTech and then convincing state lawmakers to fund the project. Those discussions centered on how SciTech could play a direct role in regional economic development and be relevant to business and industry, she said.

"We are really going to become the hub for how entrepreneurs interact with students on our campus in the STEM field and beyond," Schommer said.

Karl Peterson, associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, has been involved in the planning of SciTech. From setups where students face each other to use of technology to display work in real time, classrooms and lab spaces have been arranged to promote collaborative learning, he said.

"There is intentional design through and through," Peterson said, noting SciTech will also include gathering spaces for people to collaborate outside of classrooms. "There is a real focus on collaborative learning."

State dollars paid for most of SciTech, but UW-River Falls is responsible for raising \$5 million from private sources to fully fund the project. Of that total, nearly \$4.5 million is in hand, with the remaining \$500,000 to be raised by December, said Rick

Foy, assistant chancellor for university advancement. He thanked the many donors to the program and said the fundraising effort “demonstrates the power of collaboration” around a project that means so much to the region.

To donate to SciTech, visit uwrf.edu/university-advancement/support-scitech.

“This is a project that will help create the leaders of tomorrow, the leaders of this region,” Foy said. “That is what this project is about.”

Kristi had that same idea as she made her way through SciTech. She envisioned partly finished spaces at their completion, full of students, faculty and business leaders together, working collaboratively.

“That has always been the idea behind this, to get students and faculty working together, working with businesses and having increased collaborative learning opportunities,” she said. “To see this building progressing and to know that is going to happen is really exciting.”



A 2021 Falcon Frontier Days Rodeo participant competes during an event. Rodeo dates this year are Sept. 6 and 7. UWRF file photo.

60th Annual Falcon Frontier Days Rodeo is Sept. 6-7

Aug. 23, 2024 - The 60th annual Falcon Frontier Days Rodeo is Friday and Saturday, Sept. 6-7, at the outdoor rodeo arena at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Campus Farm located at 1475 S. Wasson Lane, River Falls. The public is invited to attend.

Friday's performance begins at 7 p.m., while Saturday's performances are set for 1:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Rodeo attendees will have the opportunity to view numerous events, ranging from saddle bronc riding to calf roping and barrel racing. The UWRF Rodeo Club will compete in the event, along with other collegiate teams that are members of the Great Plains region of the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association (NIRA). The event typically attracts about 300 participants.

Tickets are available at the gate (cash only) or online at <https://www.uwfrodeo.com/buy-tickets>. Ticket prices are \$20/adults, \$15/UWRF students purchased in advance and \$10/for ages 5-12. Free for age 4 and under. Military veterans receive a \$5 discount.

Onsite parking is available on a first-come, first-served basis at the rodeo grounds. Food will be available for purchase at the concession stand.

The Falcon Frontier Days Rodeo has been occurring annually since 1964, except for its cancellation in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The slack and performances will be livestreamed off the rodeo Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/uwrfrodeo>

For more information, visit <https://www.uwrf.edu/ANFS/FalconFrontierDaysRodeo.cfm> or call the UWRF Animal and Food Science Department at 715-425-3704.

PLEASE NOTE: Hello rodeo fans! We wanted to give some updates about the road construction on S. Wasson Lane since we have received a few questions. With true rodeo fashion, we will still be hosting our rodeo even with road construction! Since the construction is taking out the main road of entrance, we have looked on both Apple Maps and Google Maps and they also both give you a rerouted way to get around the road construction and to get to the grounds where parking will be. The best way to get to our entrance is:

+ If you are headed south on Hwy. 65, take that all the way to the roundabout by the new Kwik Trip and take the first exit which is Hwy. 35 Cemetery Road which will bring you to our rodeo grounds at the next roundabout.

+ If you are coming from Main Street or north on Hwy. 29, you will still be turning onto Hwy. 35 Cemetery Road and taking that all the way to the roundabout located next to the rodeo grounds.

With all of the road construction, please keep in mind that it may take you a few extra minutes to get to the rodeo grounds and park.



UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo interacts with a student during a t-shirt giveaway on campus in May 2023. Gallo has announced that she is retiring and will be replaced by interim Chancellor Michael V. Martin on Sept. 7. UWRF photo

Chancellor Maria Gallo announces retirement

Many notable accomplishments occurred at the university during her tenure

Aug. 1, 2024 - After numerous accomplishments, University of Wisconsin-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo has announced her retirement.

Gallo, the 20th chancellor of UWRF, began her post in July 2021, after serving as the president of Delaware Valley University. In an announcement to campus, she said she had planned to finish her career in higher education at UWRF and recently made what she called “the difficult decision” to retire. Her last day will be Sept. 6.

“Over the past weeks and months, I have thought a great deal about you and our students, as well as the important, long-term work that lies ahead for the university,” Gallo said in her message to faculty and staff. “It became clear that the timing was right for me, my family, and the campus to make this change now.”

Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman has named Michael V. Martin as UWRF’s interim chancellor. His appointment will take effect Sept. 7, but Martin will spend time on campus and work with Gallo on transitions before that date.

Martin has had a long career in higher education. He has served as president of New Mexico State University, chancellor of Louisiana State University, chancellor of Colorado State University, and most recently president of Florida Gulf Coast

University. He worked in numerous faculty and administrative positions at the University of Minnesota and has Wisconsin connections, having taught at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and at the former University of Wisconsin Center in Medford.

Martin and Gallo also share a connection. They worked together at the University of Minnesota and then at the University of Florida.

"Mike Martin has extensive experience as a higher education leader and has come highly recommended by Chancellor Gallo," Rothman said. "I am delighted he has agreed to lead the university until we find a permanent chancellor."

Rothman said a search committee will be named at a future date to identify a permanent chancellor.

Gallo said she plans to move to Florida with her partner to spend time with family and friends, write and volunteer.

Many notable accomplishments occurred at UW-River Falls during Gallo's tenure. Faculty, students and staff continued to learn through the coronavirus pandemic. Construction began on the \$117 million Science and Technology Innovation Center, the largest facility in the university's 150-year history. The state-of-the-art Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence opened. Strategic, academic and enrollment management plans were created and implemented.

Among other achievements, Gallo and others successfully advocated for changing the Wisconsin/Minnesota tuition reciprocity funding process to benefit UWRF, launched new programs and set fundraising records.

Rothman and Board of Regents President Amy Bogost praised Gallo's leadership.

"As the 20th leader of UW-River Falls, Chancellor Gallo remained focused on student success, affordability, and career readiness," Bogost said. "The partnerships she forged with employers and the community will help sustain the university in the coming years."

Gallo also noted challenges during her time on campus. In addition to getting through the pandemic, budgetary constraints and meeting the needs for increased mental health services to students have posed difficulties. Through it all, she said the highlight of her work at the university has been engaging with thousands of talented students and seeing them advance their careers.

"Serving as the chancellor of UW-River Falls has been such a privilege that has afforded me the opportunity to make a positive difference for so many students," she said.

Gallo expressed her appreciation for the talented faculty and staff that make up UWRF. She also thanked the many alumni and others who support the university in many ways. Such support, she said, makes possible great student outcomes for a cost that is less than many other public universities.

"There is no doubt that UW-River Falls is of enormous value to the city of River Falls, the region and to Wisconsin," Gallo said. "This will not change when UW-River Falls selects a new chancellor who will be dedicated to continuing the 150-year legacy of this great university and lead it forward."



Rep. Shannon Zimmerman presents UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo with a legislative citation recognizing the university's 150-year anniversary during Monday's Opening Meeting on campus that marks the beginning of the academic year. Gallo is retiring from her chancellor position. UWRF photo.

Chancellor Maria Gallo thankful for her time leading UW-River Falls

Focus will remain on student success as leadership transition occurs

Aug. 26, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls remains committed to providing students with a high-quality education, and the institution will continue to do so even as the university's leadership transitions when Chancellor Maria Gallo retires next month, she told attendees of the university's Opening Meeting Monday.

Gallo, who began as chancellor at UWRF in 2021, announced her retirement last month. Her last day at the university is Sept. 5. Michael Martin has been named interim chancellor.

Gallo recounted how she arrived at UWRF during the River Falls Days celebration and was greeted by countless community members. That warm welcome kicked off her tenure at the university in a positive manner, she said.

"I met so many of you who were sweet and warm, welcoming me to the city and to the university," Gallo said. "It was a fabulous way to begin my tenure, feeling like I belonged here."

Gallo said she felt increasingly at home at UWRF during her time at the university. She highlighted accomplishments during her time leading UWRF, among them is the \$117 million Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) that is under construction and is scheduled to open in January 2026. SciTech will provide students with state-of-the-art research opportunities and collaboration with businesses, creating student links to employers while building the regional economy.

Others include the opening of the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence; strategic, academic and enrollment management plans; setting a fundraising record; and the successful changing of the Wisconsin/Minnesota tuition reciprocity funding process that will benefit UWRF monetarily.

“As I reflect on these last three years, we have accomplished so much,” Gallo said. “I am proud of these milestones we reached together.”

Martin has had a long career in higher education. He has served as president of New Mexico State University, chancellor of Louisiana State University, chancellor of Colorado State University, and most recently as president of Florida Gulf Coast University. He worked in multiple faculty and administrative jobs at the University of Minnesota and has Wisconsin connections, having taught at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and at the former University of Wisconsin Center in Medford.

He and Gallo worked together previously at the University of Minnesota and the University of Florida. A search committee will be named at a future date to identify a new chancellor at UWRF.

Martin praised Gallo for her efforts as chancellor and for other work during her career. He noted the important role that regional four-year universities play in providing students with a quality education and in building the economy.

Universities of Wisconsin schools and universities across the country face financial and enrollment challenges. However, Martin said, UWRF is positioned to succeed despite those difficulties.

“There is really a commitment collectively here to drive this institution to its next great era,” he said. “I hope in my period of time here, I can make some contribution toward making that happen.”

Opening Meeting attendees heard about ways UWRF will celebrate its 150th anniversary. Rep. Shannon Zimmerman presented UWRF with a legislative citation recognizing the founding of the university in 1874 and discussed the importance of the university to the region. Gov. Tony Evers previously recognized the university’s milestone with a congratulatory commendation.

“Today we honor the university for 150 fantastic years,” Zimmerman said. “The memorialization of what you all have done lives on in the students who have graduated from here.”

Gallo reflected on the university’s 150 years, during which time UWRF has educated tens of thousands of students who have been served by dedicated professors and staff who set them up for success in life.

“We all know that UWRF is more than just an institution of higher learning,” Gallo said. “It is a vibrant community, a place where ideas are born, where the leaders of tomorrow are shaped, and where lifelong friendships are forged. That’s what UWRF does every single day. We change the world through our students.”

During the meeting, recipients of the 2024 faculty excellence awards were announced and recognized, along with UW-River Falls employees for their years of service. Award recipients include: Distinguished Teaching Award, David Bonko; Adviser of the Year, Chris Hergenrader; University Excellence Award in Research, Scholarly and Creative Activities, Hiawatha Smith; and University Excellence Award in Service, Steven Kelm. UWRF's sustainability program was also recognized for achieving a STARS Gold rating, its highest ranking in terms of meeting high standards for sustainability practices.



College of Education, Business and Allied Health (CEBAH) at UW-River Falls faculty members were recently recognized for outstanding contributions in the areas of research, service, teaching, and advising. Left to right: Dean Muhammad Chishty, Hiawatha Smith, Paul Shirilla, and Geoff Scheurman.

College of Education, Business and Allied Health announces 2024-25 faculty excellence awards

Aug. 29, 2024 - College of Education, Business, and Allied Health (CEBAH) at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls faculty members were recently recognized for outstanding contributions in the areas of research, service, teaching and advising.

The recipients of this year's faculty excellence awards are:

- **CEBAH Excellence in Research Award:** Hiawatha Smith, Ph.D.

Smith, associate professor of Teacher Education, has been recognized for his prolific research productivity, collaboration, and publication of a foundational text for undergraduate education majors in language arts and literacy and a professional development resource for practicing teachers. It features resources for immediate use by teachers and addresses current hot-button topics related to teaching classic literature, controversial texts and genre study.

- **CEBAH Excellence in Service Award:** Molly Gerrish, Ph.D.

Gerrish, professor in Teacher Education, as well as the Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity (URSCA) Program director, and Early Childhood Program coordinator, joined UWRF in 2006. She has devoted a tremendous amount of effort to serving her department, college and the university. Currently, Gerrish serves on numerous internal and external committees.

- **CEBAH Excellence in Teaching Award:** Geoff Scheurman, Ph.D.

Scheurman, professor of Teacher Education, is celebrated for his exceptional teaching, characterized by innovative instructional methods and a deep commitment to student success. His ability to engage and inspire students has set a high standard for educational excellence.

- **CEBAH Excellence in Advising Award:** Paul Shirilla, Ph.D.

Shirilla, associate professor of Health and Human Performance, receives this award for his outstanding commitment to student advising. His thoughtful guidance and mentorship have helped countless students navigate their academic and career paths with confidence.

Faculty excellence awards are chosen by CEBAH faculty and students.

"The faculty recognized this year from across the College of Education, Business and Allied Health are committed to student success and dedicated to scholarship. Their passion for their work has a profound impact on their students, their colleagues, their fields of study, the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, and the larger community," said CEBAH Dean Muhammad Chishty.

CEBAH faculty and staff are devoted to providing a comprehensive education that prepares students for successful careers in education, business and health-related fields. The college is committed to fostering academic excellence, innovation and community engagement.

For more information, visit www.uwrf.edu/academics/cebah or call 715-425-3774.



Natalie Beyerl, left, a junior at UW-River Falls, records data about the bottom of a section of the Kinnickinnic River provided to her by Cody Helriegel, a sophomore at UW-Eau Claire in River Falls near the Junction Falls Dam. Beyerl and Helriegel are among seven Universities of Wisconsin students who are part of the Dam, Analysis and Monitoring (DAM) Crew that is conducting research on the river in partnership with the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin. UWRF photo.

Research in the river: UW-River Falls-led program provides valuable hands-on learning opportunities

Students' work to be used to improve Kinnickinnic River conditions

Aug. 13, 2024 - Standing nearly waist deep in water, Vincent Lamantia dipped measuring equipment under the surface of the Kinnickinnic River, then lifted it out and studied the amount of sediment in it.

The answer? Not much, a good sign of water clarity and ecological health at that point of the river.

"The clarity is greater than 100," Lamantia exclaimed to Natalie Beyerl, a fellow member of the Dam, Analysis and Monitoring (DAM) Crew, a group of seven students overseen by University of Wisconsin-River Falls faculty who are conducting an ecological study of the river well known for its pure water, its Class 1 trout designation, and its recreational opportunities.

"OK," Beyerl responded before asking, "Greater than 120?"

"Yes, greater than 120," Lamantia answered back.

DAM Crew members continued to communicate as they collected data along the river on August 8. A moment later two students pushed poles through the water to the river's bottom, testing the makeup of the sediment there. They discussed their findings – mostly sand with a few rocks – with Beyerl, the team leader who was recording the team's results. Group members took other readings, including water temperature, the extent of aquatic plants providing fish habitat, and what was growing along the river's banks before moving to measure the waterway's next segment.

DAM Crew is a two-week student experience funded by the [Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin](#) in which water science faculty and professionals train undergraduates in waterway monitoring techniques and research. In its third year, the program not only provides participating students with hands-on, real-time research opportunities but their work will be used to inform the decisions of officials in charge of removing the Junction Falls and Powell Falls dams along the river.

Students' research data will also be used to educate the [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#) and other conservation groups about river conditions with the two dams in place and how removal of those structures will affect the stream's ecological health.

This summer's DAM Crew participants include Beyerl, a UWRF junior from Evansville majoring in ecology; Lamantia, a UWRF junior from West Chicago, Ill., majoring in ecology; Robert Boss, a UWRF junior from Hayward majoring in conservation; Cody Helriegel, a UW-Eau Claire sophomore from Big Lake, Minn., majoring in environmental public health; Leo Pierce, a UW-Eau Claire junior from Farmington, Minn., majoring in biology; Aurora Figard, a UW-Whitewater senior from Lake Geneva majoring in environmental science; and Alex Kiesler, a UW-Whitewater senior from Wind Lake majoring in environmental science.

Dams cause water to pool into lakes, which can allow them to heat up and alter their ecology. The Kinnickinnic River is a clean, cold-water stream known for its trout fishing and other recreational opportunities. For years the community has debated the benefits and consequences of the dams, with many individuals and groups advocating for removal of the two dams to preserve and improve the river's ecological health.

In 2018, the city of River Falls decided to remove the dams and restore the riverway to its natural state. Three years later the Kiap-TU-Wish chapter of [Trout Unlimited](#) and [Inter-Fluve](#), a firm that specializes in river restoration, developed an extensive 10-year monitoring plan for the project to meet the city's goal of monitoring the dam removal process.

The initial plan relied on volunteers to conduct river monitoring, which resulted in challenges related to how often monitoring would occur and the reliability of data over time. Organizations involved with the project then partnered with UWRF to devise a river study team that could provide consistent, reliable data while offering learning opportunities for students.

Jill Coleman Wasik, UWRF environmental science professor, and Heather Davis, lab manager in the Plant and Earth Science Department, successfully received grant funding from the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin to create the DAM Crew. This year's student team is building on research from the past two years and adding to data about the impacts of the city's dams and stormwater discharges that has been measured by Trout Unlimited since 1992.

After spending last week studying in the river, students will spend this week compiling the data they gathered, comparing it to existing data, and working with other stakeholders involved with the health of the Kinnickinnic.

Coleman Wasik, who leads DAM Crew students each summer, smiled as she watched crew members work diligently

compiling and recording data of all sorts about the Kinnickinnic River as it flows through River Falls.

"It's so much fun to work with these students," Coleman Wasik said. "They're so excited about the work they're doing, about learning and adding to this important project. They know what they're supposed to do, and they've really taken ownership of it."

Donning waders as they made their way from one section of the river to the next, recording data all the while, students exhibited enthusiasm for their work. They said their hands-on data collection helps bring their classroom lessons alive.

"Out here, we're seeing what we've learned about in class and putting all of that together and making a lot of connections," Pierce said. "Now I can see how these different concepts work in real time."

DAM Crew members said they've enjoyed getting to know other science students from Universities of Wisconsin schools. Knowing that their work will be used by scientists and conservationists to work toward improved water quality in the Kinnickinnic was motivating, students said.

"You realize that this is a really big deal, and we are having an impact on something that matters," Lamantia said. "If we can do our part to help make this river healthier and more accessible, that benefits everybody."

Other students said their research experience in the river helped reinforce that they want to work in a science field. Figard said she hadn't done much field research previously and jumped at the opportunity to participate in DAM Crew.

"It was important for me to try this to see if it's what I really want to do, and now I know that it is," she said with a smile. "To know that our work is having an impact on this river, it is a very cool feeling."

UW-River Falls adds online business administration major

Aug. 6, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls will offer a fully online business administration major beginning fall 2024. The College of Education, Business and Allied Health 's (CEBAH) School of Business and Economics (SBE) will be home to the asynchronous program designed to provide students with a flexible, high-quality education that meets the demands of today's dynamic business environment.

The major's online delivery method is tailored to accommodate the diverse needs of modern learners, including working professionals, transfer students and those balancing family commitments. The program combines UWRF's commitment to academic excellence with the convenience of online learning, allowing students to complete courses in the major from anywhere in the world.

"This is a new and significant addition to our portfolio of undergraduate programs because it allows all students, both traditional and working adults, the opportunity to complete a business degree regardless of where they live or work," said Muhammad Chishty, CEBAH dean. "The classes are offered fully online in accelerated eight-week long sessions throughout the year, giving them tremendous flexibility in selecting classes while maintaining the desired work-life balance in their lives."

Accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, SBE is a regional leader in business and economic education.

For more information about the program or to apply, visit uwrf.edu/programs/business-administration-online, email cebah@uwrf.edu or call 715-425-3335.



The

UW-River Falls Society of Physics students will open the UWRF observatory for free public stargazing on Monday, Sept. 9, from 8:30-10 p.m. All ages are welcome. UWRF file photo.

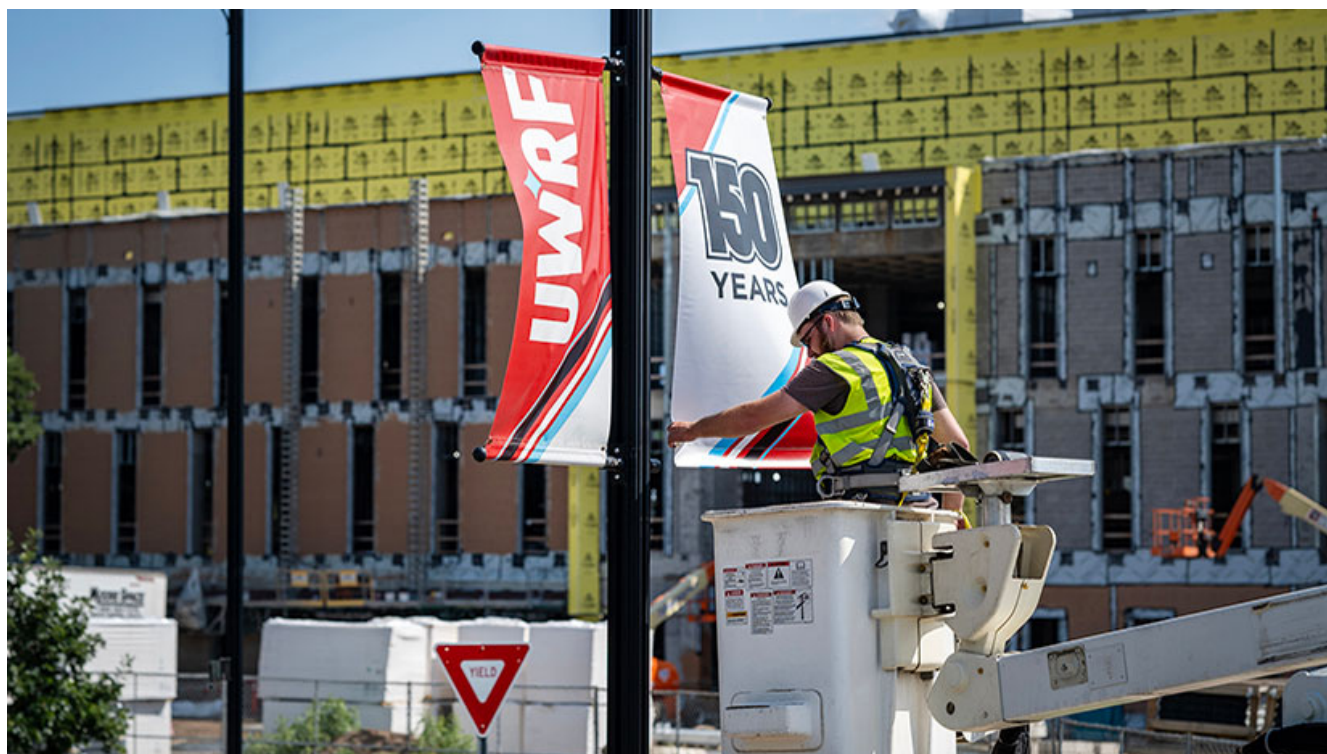
UW-River Falls hosts public stargazing opportunity Sept. 9

Aug. 23, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls Society of Physics students will open the UWRF observatory for free public stargazing on Monday, Sept. 9, from 8:30-10 p.m. All ages are welcome.

Multiple telescopes and binoculars will be available to look more closely at a variety of celestial objects -- the waxing crescent Moon, Venus, Saturn's rings, Globular Clusters, and more! Stargazers might also be fortunate enough to witness an extremely rare nova that erupts for about one week every 80 years (though the exact timing is unknown so this could happen before or after this event).

The UWRF observatory is located on the south side of Centennial Science Hall, 511 S. 6th St., River Falls. Enter the building through that south door and take the elevator or stairs up to the third floor observatory lobby then go outside into the dome or out on the observing deck. Faculty and students will be on hand to point the telescopes and answer any questions about what you see, point out prominent constellations and specific bright stars.

For more information, visit <https://www.uwrf.edu/PHYS/Observatory.cfm>.



Max Elliott, a groundskeeper at UW-River Falls, puts up a banner celebrating the 150th anniversary of the university's founding. UWRF will celebrate the milestone at numerous events throughout the upcoming academic year. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls to celebrate its 150-year anniversary

Numerous events set throughout the academic year

Aug. 26, 2024 - In 1897, 23 years after the founding of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls (known then as the State Normal School), the university's one building was destroyed by fire.

Remarkably, only a half day of classes was missed when local churches, lodge rooms and other meeting spaces were utilized to serve as classrooms.

School employees and River Falls residents then rallied to keep the Normal School in the location where it began, offsetting efforts to move it elsewhere. They were successful, and only nine months after the original building was destroyed, a new one, now known as South Hall, stood in its place.

That determined mindset is symbolic of UWRF's commitment to provide life-changing educational opportunities for students from the St. Croix River Valley and elsewhere since the university was established in 1874. To recognize that spirit and all that UWRF has meant to River Falls, the region, the state and beyond, the university will celebrate its 150th anniversary throughout the 2024-25 academic year.

"UW-River Falls has a long track record of having a tremendous impact on this region, on Wisconsin and beyond," Chancellor

Maria Gallo said during Monday's opening meeting that marks the beginning of the upcoming academic year. "One hundred and fifty years is an important milestone, and our university is excited to celebrate its important history throughout this year."

Multiple events will commemorate the university's founding, among them:

- A UWRF employee medallion hunt where participants follow clues to locate the medallion on campus. Thanks to a UWRF donor, the winner will receive River Falls Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau "Chamber Bucks" valued at \$250, money intended to support the River Falls community. Chamber Bucks are honored at any Chamber-member business.
- Following the annual homecoming parade on Saturday, Oct. 5, UWRF will host a 150th anniversary tailgate party at David Smith Stadium at Ramer Field. The event begins at 11:30 a.m. and features a performance by UWRF student Hailey James, an award-winning singer, songwriter and recording artist.
- Next spring, as part of the closing ceremony for the sesquicentennial celebration, university officials will open a time capsule buried in 1975 and originally located near the former Hagestad Student Center. The time capsule was excavated and preserved in fall 2022 when Hagestad was demolished to make way for the Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) now under construction.

Other celebrations are being finalized. For more details about how UWRF will celebrate its milestone anniversary and for historical information about the university, visit www.uwrf.edu/about/150-years. Send questions about the 150th anniversary to events@uwrf.edu.

College of Arts and Sciences honors faculty excellence with annual awards

Sept. 5, 2024 - The College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls has announced recipients of this year's faculty awards recognizing excellence in research, service, teaching and advising.

The awards, given annually, are intended to highlight the dedication and positive impact of CAS faculty.

Recipients of this year's faculty excellence awards nominated by CAS faculty are:

- **CAS Research, Scholarly, and Creative Activity Award: Brett Kallusky**

Kallusky, professor of art, is recognized for his work having a significant and positive impact on the art department and on art overall during the past five years. During that time, Kallusky's accomplishments include creating a fine arts photography book detailing impacts of climate crisis, taking part in multiple exhibitions, and service as a portfolio reviewer. He was the recipient of the 2020 Minnesota State Arts Board Grant and a semi-finalist for the competitive McKnight Fellowship in Visual Arts.

- **CAS Service Award: Lisa Kroutil**

Kroutil, professor of chemistry and biotechnology, is recognized for her extensive contributions to her department, college, UWRF and the surrounding community. As one award nominator explained, "(Kroutil) cares deeply about the academic success of UWRF students," makes "selfless contributions when department needs arise" and "provides excellent care for her advisees by focusing on listening to them and their needs."

Recipients of this year's faculty excellence awards nominated by students and approved by a faculty committee of past award winners are:

- **CAS Teaching Award: Melissa Hayslip**

Hayslip, assistant professor of sociology, criminology and anthropology, is honored for demonstrating outstanding teaching qualities and techniques that help her students learn and remember content effectively. Her students praise Hayslip's innovative teaching methods and her deep sense of caring for her students. "She is incredibly kind and understanding, and she actively checked in on me last semester. She is also clearly passionate about what she teaches," one student said of Hayslip.

- **CAS Advising Award: Todd Wilkinson**

Wilkinson, professor of psychological sciences, is recognized for his exemplary commitment to guiding and supporting students, helping them achieve their academic and professional goals. Students praised his work to help them transition to college life during their first year on campus and connecting them with needed resources. They noted his commitment to student success and well-being. "Not only has he provided opportunities, but he has given unconditional support in times when I did not believe in myself," one student said of Wilkinson.

"We're delighted to recognize these CAS faculty for their outstanding commitments to service, scholarship, advising, and teaching," CAS Dean Wes Kisting said. "Exemplary efforts like these are what make our college and university so special. They make a tremendous, positive impact on our students."

CAS prepares students for fulfilling lives as well as rewarding careers. CAS offers a world-class, forward-thinking liberal arts experience distinguished by a deep, student-centered commitment to personal mentoring, high-impact practices and a culture of care for every Falcon.

For more information, visit uwrf.edu/CAS/Awards/index.cfm.



UW-River Falls students make their way through campus Sept. 17. Overall enrollment and enrollment among first-year students are higher compared to last year's figures. UWRF photo.

Driven by first-year student increase, total enrollment climbs

Recruitment efforts, new programs attract more students

Sept. 20, 2024 - The number of first-year students attending the University of Wisconsin-River Falls is up 6.6% above last year, marking the second consecutive year that figure has grown.

Overall enrollment at UWRF also grew from last year, up 3.2% to 5,222 students, 160 more than last year, according to preliminary 10th-day census numbers. New first-year students total 1,132, or 70 more than were enrolled at the start of the 2023-24 academic year.

The total student growth over 2023-24 marks the first time in several years that overall enrollment increased, a sign that UWRF is making progress attracting students, said Laura King, vice chancellor for student affairs and strategic enrollment.

"We are really pleased to see these kinds of numbers," King said. "To have a bigger freshman class for the second consecutive year and to see our overall enrollment up too, it feels really great."

The enrollment increase is attributable in part to the success of programs that allow non-degree-seeking students affordable access to classes for UWRF credit, primarily geared towards high schoolers taking college courses through the [Dual Academic Credit Program](#) (DACP) and similar options. That figure now totals 679, 137 more than last year, a 25% increase.

The admissions team at UWRF had set goals of 1,100 first-year students and 200 new transfer students, King said, and exceeded both. New transfer students enrolled total 216, an increase of 28 over last year.

The higher enrollment figures are especially notable given enrollment concerns among higher education institutions across the U.S. because of problems with the rollout of the revamped Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process that many students and their parents use to determine financial aid for college. The process that was supposed to be made simpler instead had months of delays and errors that disrupted decision timelines for current and prospective college students.

To offset those challenges and a years-long trend of smaller high school graduating classes and fewer of those graduates attending four-year colleges and universities, UWRF has taken numerous steps to attract students, including:

- Adding an admissions counselor who is dedicated to recruiting efforts in the Twin Cities metro area. The Twin Cities area is the largest population center near UWRF.
- Adopting a new student-centered registration and orientation model that is designed to better recruit students.
- The addition of men's soccer and reinstating baseball as varsity sports this year.
- The continued offering of Esports and marching band programs. They were introduced at UWRF last year and helped attract additional students.

"These higher enrollment numbers that we are seeing are a sign that the strategies we have adopted are working," King said.

UWRF is one of eight Universities of Wisconsin schools at which enrollment is higher.

"The fact that overall enrollment is up at the UWs despite the federal FAFSA fiasco is proof positive that Wisconsinites know that education unlocks opportunities," Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman said.

Please note: The data reported here reflects preliminary official census day enrollment numbers, using student counts on the 10th day of class. These numbers are slightly different than the enrollment estimates published Sept. 16 by the Universities of Wisconsin using census day estimates based on the first day of class enrollments, in part due to the later registration deadlines for DACP students. Final census day enrollment numbers for all Universities of Wisconsin will be communicated later this fall.



Members of First National Bank of River Falls and UW-River Falls officials celebrate a \$110,000 donation from the bank to the university's Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech), pictured in the background. SciTech has been under construction for the past year and is scheduled to open in January 2026. UWRF photo.

First National Bank of River Falls donates \$110,000 to SciTech building

Funding the latest in a longtime partnership between the bank, UWRF

Sept. 5, 2024 - For more than a century, First National Bank of River Falls has demonstrated its support for the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. The institution's latest commitment will dramatically impact the university's future.

The bank has donated \$110,000 toward the UWRF Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech), a \$117 million structure that is currently under construction and is scheduled to open in January 2026.

In recognition of the gift, a first floor SciTech laboratory will be named the First National Bank of River Falls Environmental Biology Research Lab.

Five generations after George Theodore Smith founded First National Bank of River Falls in 1904, the Smith family remains actively involved. Sandra Smith Wurm serves as chair of the bank's board of directors. The family and institution have established a tradition of proactively partnering with UWRF on numerous initiatives that have benefited students, the community and region.

Jeff Johnson, president and chief executive officer of First National Bank of River Falls, said the donation is in recognition of the high-impact opportunities SciTech will provide to students, faculty and businesses in the region and beyond.

“For many decades, we have worked hand in hand with UWRF to support the educational and professional growth of our community,” Johnson said. “This gift is a testament to our shared commitment to fostering excellence and empowering the next generation of leaders. By investing in the university, we are building on a legacy of partnership that has greatly benefited the St. Croix Valley region, and we look forward to the continued success of our collaboration.”

Construction on the three-story, 136,000 square-foot SciTech building began a year ago. Funding for SciTech, the largest structure ever built at UW-River Falls, was approved by Wisconsin lawmakers as part of the 2021-23 state budget.

SciTech will house state-of-the-art learning spaces with a focus on active learning. It will include a University and Business Collaboration Center in which businesses will partner with students and faculty on research and other projects, providing high-level educational opportunities and links to student employment. University officials estimate more than 60% of students will take at least one class in SciTech.

Rick Foy, assistant chancellor for university advancement, praised the Smith family and First National Bank of River Falls for their longtime support of UWRF.

“Time and again, the Smith family and First National Bank of River Falls have been there for the university, ready and willing to provide critical resources for our top-priority programs and projects,” Foy said. “On behalf of Chancellor Maria Gallo, the university and the UWRF Foundation, I express deep appreciation for this impactful SciTech contribution.”

State funding paid for most of SciTech, but UWRF is responsible for raising \$5 million from private sources to fully fund the project. Of that total, nearly \$4.5 million is in hand, with the remaining \$500,000 to be raised by December. To donate to SciTech, visit uwrf.edu/university-advancement/support-scitech.



The

UW-River Falls Marching Band performs as part of the university's 2023 Homecoming parade in downtown River Falls. This year's Homecoming events take place Sept. 30-Oct. 6, with the parade on Saturday, Oct. 5. UWRF file photo.

Homecoming celebration includes commemoration of university's 150th anniversary

Community invited to celebratory events Sept. 30-Oct. 6

Sept. 24, 2024 - The public is invited to the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Sept. 30-Oct. 6 to celebrate Homecoming festivities that will feature a range of fun activities.

This year's celebration will commemorate not only new and traditional Homecoming events but also celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of UWRF.

Among the events recognizing both Homecoming and UWRF's proud history is the 150th Anniversary Tailgate Party featuring a performance by UWRF student Hailey James, an award-winning singer, songwriter and recording artist, on Saturday, Oct. 5, at 11:30 a.m. at David Smith Stadium at Ramer Field.

James is a five-time award winner from the Midwest Country Music Organization and has performed during a Minnesota Vikings halftime show at U.S. Bank Stadium. She has also opened for such country music legends as Carrie Underwood, Diamond Rio and Crystal Gayle.

Recognizing UWRF's 150th anniversary will make Homecoming an even bigger celebration, Alumni Relations Officer Pedro Renta said.

"It's a wonderful weekend to welcome alumni back to the university along with the community," Renta said. "It's a time to remember, laugh, and reconnect with your Falcon family. Homecoming brings all Falcons together."

Other featured Homecoming events include:

Home-Cooked Homecoming Meal, Monday, Sept. 30, 11 a.m.-1 p.m., University Center Terrace. Professor Jake's Bean Soup is a Homecoming tradition at UWRF. The meal is free and open to the public. Email studentinvolvement@uwrf.edu if questions.

Homecoming Women's Soccer Match, Wednesday, Oct. 2, 3 p.m., Ramer Soccer Field. Falcons vs. UW-Stout.

Homecoming Men's Soccer Match, Friday, Oct. 4, 4 p.m., Ramer Soccer Field. Falcons vs. UW-Whitewater.

Homecoming Volleyball Game, Friday, Oct. 4, 7 p.m., Page Arena at Falcon Center. Falcons vs. UW-Platteville.

Friends and Family Night, Friday, Oct. 4, 6-10 p.m., University Center and Falcon Center. The public is invited to tour campus and take part in other activities such as enjoying a murder mystery dinner, climbing a rock wall, or enjoying BINGO in the University Center. For more information, email studentinvolvement@uwrf.edu.

Homecoming Tour, Saturday, Oct. 5, 8:50 a.m. arrival, tour departs at 9 a.m., University Center (next to Einstein Bros. Bagels). Take a one-hour tour of campus to bring back old memories and to see what's new. Registration required at events.idonate.com/campustour/.

Alumni and Friends Coffee, Saturday, Oct. 5, 9 a.m., Ostness Park, N. 2nd Street and E. Elm Street, River Falls. Stop by and enjoy a complimentary cup of coffee and socialize with fellow UWRF alumni and friends.

Homecoming Parade, Saturday, Oct. 5, 10 a.m., downtown River Falls. Join in the celebration of UWRF along 2nd Street in this long-standing Homecoming tradition.

Homecoming Football Game, Saturday, Oct. 5, 1 p.m., David Smith Stadium at Ramer Field. Falcons vs. UW-Eau Claire.

Homecoming Concert, Sunday, Oct. 6, 2 p.m., Abbott Concert Hall, Kleinpell Fine Arts. Featuring the Symphony Band, choir and alumni choir.

A complete list of Homecoming events is available at students.uwrf.edu/student-involvement/homecoming. For more information, call Alumni Relations at 715-425-4553.

UW-River Falls professors awarded National Science Foundation grant to study carbon and nitrogen cycling

Sept. 12, 2024 - Two University of Wisconsin-River Falls faculty have been awarded a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to study carbon and nitrogen cycling in agricultural soils to understand their environmental movement and transformations.



Bahareh Hassanpour, assistant professor of environmental science and environmental engineering, was awarded the grant under the NSF's Empowering Broader Academic Capacity and Education (EMBRACE) program. EMBRACE supports research and education at primarily undergraduate institutions. This funding allocates \$400,000 to Hassanpour as principal investigator and to co-principal investigator Jill Coleman Wasik, professor of environmental science.

"We are very excited that this grant supports bringing research staff to our campus and provides funding for our undergraduate students to be involved in research," Hassanpour said.

Hassanpour's research focuses on water quality in agricultural areas. The goal of her work is to understand the processes that impact nutrient cycling, particularly of carbon and nitrogen, which are critical to maintaining the balance of life on Earth.

Agricultural activities have depleted carbon in soils, reducing soil quality and biodiversity, negatively impacting the soil-water balance, and making soil more vulnerable to erosion. Excess nitrogen caused by heavy use of fertilizers can contaminate waterways, resulting in algal blooms and fish kills or leaching into groundwater, making it unsafe to drink.

How carbon and nitrogen cycle in soils depends on environmental conditions such as precipitation and soil water content, yet little is known about these mechanisms. Understanding these connections is critical for farmers to make better land use and crop management decisions and to develop effective nutrient management strategies.

The study that Hassanpour and Coleman Wasik will conduct aligns well with one of the four priority research areas, stewarding land and water resources, under Wisconsin's Dairy Innovation Hub. As one of five faculty positions at UW-River Falls funded by the Hub, Hassanpour used Hub startup funds to collect preliminary data to support her successful NSF grant application.

Hassanpour's experience as a child inspired her career path. Despite living in northern Iran, an area on the coast of the Caspian Sea with abundant water where paddy fields are common, her tap water was often not safe to drink. She and her sisters carried home containers of potable water from a deep well that was more than a quarter mile from their home.



As she grew older, Hassanpour learned that the situation in southern Iran was even worse, as water there was not only polluted but scarcer. Hassanpour could only wonder how far those children had to go to find a source of safe drinking water. When it came time to choose a major in college, she was drawn to agricultural engineering with a focus on water engineering, and she continues that work at UW-River Falls.

Headshots:

Top: Bahareh Hassanpour

Bottom: Jill Coleman Wasik



Mark Klapatch-Mathias, sustainability coordinator at UW-River Falls, discusses sustainability measures with the university's Foundation Board. UWRF has been recognized among colleges internationally for its commitment to sustainability practices. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls highlighted in 2024 Sustainable Campus Index

University lauded for its ongoing commitment to sustainability measures

Sept. 11, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has received international recognition for its continued, ongoing dedication to invest in efforts related to sustainability that have benefited not only the university but the surrounding community.

UWRF has been recognized for its commitment to sustainability in the [2024 Sustainable Campus Index](#), a publication from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). The Sustainable Campus Index recognizes top-performing sustainable colleges and universities overall and in 17 impact areas, evaluated through the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS).

UWRF is being recognized for its efforts in the Investment and Finance category of the Sustainable Campus Index. The index notes "sustainable investment processes improve the long-term health of institutional endowments, encourage better corporate behavior, support innovative product development, and build a more just and sustainable financial system."

Mark Klapatch-Mathias, sustainability coordinator at UWRF, said the Sustainable Campus Index ranking is an acknowledgement of the university's dedication to making sustainability a tangible part of campus life.

"This recognition is the result of the diligent efforts of our Foundation Board and committees who spent significant time discussing our investment policies and our sustainable investment data over the past few years," he said. "Inclusion in the Sustainable Campus Index is testimony to our ongoing commitment to the UWRF core value of sustainability."

UWRF garnered its Sustainable Campus Index recognition through its high ratings in the Investor Responsibility and Sustainable Investment portions of the Investment and Finance category. Those ratings show the university's dedication to ensuring that sustainability remains a vital goal, Klapatch-Mathias said.

Meghan Fay Zahniser, AASHE executive director, praised UWRF for its ongoing dedication toward multiple sustainability efforts.

"All of us at AASHE extend our warmest congratulations to UW-River Falls for their leadership," Fay Zahniser said. "By fostering sustainable practices and initiatives, UW-River Falls sets an inspiring example for its peers."

The Sustainable Campus Index is the most recent of multiple awards and recognitions UWRF has received in recent years. In April, the university received a STARS Gold rating recognizing its sustainability efforts in all aspects of higher education. UWRF was the only Universities of Wisconsin school to achieve a gold rating this year.

Last year UWRF won the Higher Education Kit Challenge, a competition sponsored by Focus on Energy. Other sustainability efforts, such as its Don't Throw It, Donate It! move out collection program, the annual Earth Fest in conjunction with community partners, and its designations as a Fair Trade Campus and Bee Campus also have earned distinction.

The UWRF Foundation has established a fund to support the university's sustainability programs at uwrf.edu/give/sustainability. For more information, email mark.klapatch@uwrf.edu or call 715-425-4333.



UW-River Falls students share a laugh as they walk across campus. The university has been recognized by U.S. News & World Report, The Princeton Review, and Forbes for providing students with a high-quality education. UWRF file photo.

UW-River Falls receives national recognition for providing high-quality education

High rankings received by U.S. News & World Report, The Princeton Review, Forbes

Sept. 24, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has once again been recognized by multiple publications as one of the top public regional universities in the Midwest, a sign of the university's ongoing commitment to providing students a high-quality education.

U.S. News & World Report, The Princeton Review and Forbes have each selected UWRF for its excellence in educating students. The rankings also reflect college affordability and students being prepared for successful careers.

"Our faculty and staff create transformational experiences for students that extend beyond classes, including internships, study abroad, athletics, research and creative activities, and in so many other ways," Chapin said. "These experiences position our graduates for success both in life and in their professional careers at a price point that is an excellent value."

The U.S. News & World Report's [2025 Best Colleges](#) rankings released on Sept. 24 is the most recent evidence of UWRF providing students with a quality education. The acclaimed publication lists UWRF as the No. 13-ranked regional university among public schools in the Midwest and [48th among regional universities in the Midwest](#).

Those rankings are both improvements compared to last year, when UWRF was deemed the 14th-best public school in the Midwest and placed 60th among regional Midwestern universities. In 2023 rankings, UWRF was 18th and 75th, respectively, in those categories.

The U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges rankings are calculated using up to 19 measures of academic quality, with the intent of helping students and their families identify colleges that best fit their needs. The report evaluates 1,500 colleges and universities nationally.

UWRF also received recognition from The Princeton Review and has been named to the publication's Best Regional Colleges list for 2025. UWRF is among 150 colleges to be listed in the Midwest region and is one of three public schools in Wisconsin.

The Princeton Review, a leading education services company in the U.S., states that colleges making its list are “academically outstanding and worth consideration in your college search.” The ranking is based on feedback from current students.

Students praised UWRF for its quality education at an affordable price. Faculty are dedicated to helping them succeed academically and to preparing them for the workplace, students said. They also praised the many opportunities, such as internships and study abroad opportunities, available to them.

The campus offers many opportunities, from outdoors activities to involvement in many organizations, students said. Many spoke in support of the warm, friendly environment.

“This is easily one of the most welcoming campuses I've ever been on,” one student said. “You can sit with or talk to absolutely anybody.”

UWRF also is ranked among Forbes 2024 list of America's Top Colleges which ranks the top 500 colleges nationally. UWRF is ranked at No. 446 and is among six public schools and eight overall in Wisconsin to receive the designation.

Forbes uses the rankings to determine which 500 American colleges offer the best educational, financial, and career outcomes for students.



UW-River Falls Sustainability Coordinator Mark Klapatch-Mathias, left, discusses electrically powered lawn care equipment with an attendee at last year's Powered by Electricity. This year's event, outside of the UWRF's North Hall, is Saturday, Sept. 28. UWRF file photo.

UW-River Falls to host Powered by Electricity event Sept. 28 in collaboration with community partners

Sessions will feature electric vehicles, tools, exhibitors, and round table discussion

Sept. 17, 2024 - Electrically powered vehicles, tools and other equipment are becoming increasingly popular, and people can learn more about the move toward greater reliance on electrical power and its impact on sustainability at an upcoming free event at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

The fourth annual Powered by Electricity is from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 28, in parking lots Pay 1 and Q next to UWRF's North Hall, 410 S. 3rd St., River Falls. The UWRF Sustainability Office partners with the St. Croix Electric Cooperative, Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services and nonprofit Hope for Earth to put on the event.

The event will include an electric vehicle showcase at which people can learn about electric vehicles (EVs) from the owners of those vehicles and test drive vehicles themselves. Attendees can hear from experts familiar with electric power during a round table discussion.

Demonstrations of electrically powered tools, lawn mowers, and other equipment also will occur. Children's activities are scheduled along with a food truck and drawings for prizes. In addition, numerous organizations will sponsor exhibits. Electric

vehicles will be available to shuttle people to and from Bacon Bash in River Falls.

“This event highlights an abundance of opportunities to embrace the future through small and large actions,” said Mark Klapatch-Mathias, UWRF sustainability coordinator. The collaboration between the four event sponsors “allows for a diverse series of displays, from leaf blowers to solar to vehicles to motorcycles to lawn mowers and more.”

The event occurs in conjunction with National Drive Electric Week, a national effort to raise awareness about the benefits of electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles.

Powered by Electricity is a part of the movement toward greater use of electric power happening across the U.S., said David Chavie, director of energy innovation for Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services.

“Pierce Pepin Cooperative embraces this type of public event because it is a great demonstration of the energy transition happening across the country,” Chavie said. “The event gives people a hands-on experience of the tool and technology advancements that are available now to help them power their daily lives more efficiently, sustainably, and often more enjoyably.”

Adopting more sustainable practices continues to be a goal and an area of emphasis at UW-River Falls, Klapatch-Mathias said. This event is one more example that sustainable practices are happening frequently beyond campus as well, he said.

For more information about the event, call 715-425-4333 or email sustainability@uwrf.edu.



Joan Mayen, who started the Don't Throw It, Donate It! program at UW-River Falls in 2006, right, talks about the effort with Mark Klapatch-Mathias, UWRF sustainability coordinator, left, as they sort through items. Mayen, recently retired, announced she is stepping down from overseeing the program, but plans to remain involved with it. UWRF photo.

Coordinator of move-out collection effort leaving a legacy

Don't Throw It, Donate It! program has saved tons of items from landfill, offered to people in need

Oct. 2, 2024 - A dinner conversation in spring 2005 has turned into an effort that has saved nearly 60,000 pounds of items from a landfill and has given them another use while helping people in the process.

In May 2005, River Falls resident Joan Mayen was having dinner with her daughter Brittany, who was a senior at River Falls High School. Brittany said she and some friends were going dumpster diving at the nearby University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Joan was surprised. Dumpster diving?

Brittany explained that some of her high school classmates searched through the many objects that UW-River Falls students discarded at the end of the academic year, finding valuable items to keep in the process.

That revelation motivated Joan and her husband Mike (Joan recently retired as a financial specialist at UW-River Falls having

previously managed the campus Information Desk; Mike retired last year as campus painter) to take action. Concerned about useful items being discarded, they decided to start an annual collection of articles otherwise destined for dumpsters.

They met with UWRF Residence Life Department personnel to discuss starting an annual collection effort, providing students the opportunity to donate items they no longer wanted to River Falls nonprofit organizations. The effort, titled Don't Throw It, Donate It!, began in 2006.

Since then, the collection has occurred on campus for three weeks each spring through final exam week, with students donating items they would otherwise throw away. Joan, Mike, and other members of the Don't Throw It, Donate It! team sort and pack the items and deliver them to River Falls nonprofit organizations.

Initially, River Falls businesses Treasures from the Heart and Second Chances, along with the River Falls Food Pantry, received donations from the program. Our Neighbors' Place, a daytime service center for unhoused residents and others in need, and the River Falls School District subsequently were added to the donations list.

Those receiving the donations through the years praised the effort, saying it not only saves items from the landfill but provides the much-needed items to people who otherwise often couldn't afford them. For example, Our Neighbors' Place receives food, personal care items, clothing, shoes, and household items such as area rugs, fans and vacuum cleaners. The nonprofit agency in turn is able to provide those items to people in need of them, said Shelly Smith, executive director of Our Neighbors' Place.

"We're so grateful to receive all of these items," Smith said. "These donations make a huge, positive difference in the lives of our clients. Without Joan and this program, we simply wouldn't be able to provide people with this kind of assistance."

Growth, partnership

From 2006-15, Mike, Joan and family members worked diligently to collect clothing, personal care and household items, and nonperishable food donated by students and hauled it, load by load, in their pickup truck from campus to their garage. From there they sorted and packed items for donation, the amount of which continued to grow year by year.

In the program's early years, Joan said she didn't track the number of items donated and their weight. She began recording that information in 2012, a year when the effort collected 1,695 items totaling 1.19 tons. By 2016, those figures had increased to 5,102 items and 2.87 tons. Totals for 2024 were the highest yet, at 5,403 items and 3.98 tons.

Since 2012, collections total 46,353 items and 29.41 tons.

To accommodate the larger number of donations, the Mayens added a 16-foot-long trailer for hauling. They recruited family members to help with the effort.

"Each year the number of items collected grew more and more," Joan said. "The generosity of the students was remarkable."

By 2016, a decade after the start of Don't Throw It, Donate It!, the effort was stretched thin because of the program's growing

success. Joan, Mike, and their family could no longer keep up with demand. Space in the Mayens' garage wasn't adequate for storing and sorting donated items.

Joan then met with Mark Klapatch-Mathias, UWRF sustainability coordinator, to discuss the manpower and space shortage. Klapatch-Mathias had a solution: space on campus to serve as a collection and sorting site, and student volunteers to help with the labor. Joan and Klapatch-Mathias formed a planning committee to operate the program as efficiently as possible.

Klapatch-Mathias said partnering with Mayen and Don't Throw It, Donate It! made sense for UWRF. The program addresses social, economic, and environmental sustainability, he said, and offers UWRF students an exceptional hands-on learning opportunity in which they feel they can make a personal difference.

"With a goal of diverting items from a landfill and the partnerships in place to donate to local community organizations, the program benefits our direct campus operations as well as our broader community," he said.

In addition, the UWRF [Sustainability Office](#) and the university's Green Team student organization joined the Residence Life Department in supporting Don't Throw It, Donate It! As time progressed, more students, faculty, and staff became part of the effort.

"The generous offer of space on campus and the additional volunteers sent the program to new heights," Joan said.

'Breath of fresh air'

Students who worked with Joan praise her warm, caring personality. Former student Kellie Claflin recalled first meeting Joan in 2007, when Joan managed the campus Information Desk, and being struck by her empathy for students.

"I remember how welcoming, kind and caring she was," Claflin said of Joan. "She truly cared about us and our success. She really helped shape how I approach work and working with others."

Claflin, now an assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural Communication, Education, and Leadership at Ohio State University, and Joan keep in touch. Joan visited Claflin when she lived in Oregon. When Claflin returns to the River Falls area, she and Joan get together.

"If I'm going through something where I need somebody to just listen and care and be sincere and vulnerable, Joan's that person. She's just so wonderful," Claflin said.

Klapatch-Mathias noted Joan's skilled mentoring of students she worked with through the years. Her warm, considerate personality helped students find their place and gain self-confidence, he said.

"Joan's efforts to start and run the move out program for so many years demonstrates exactly who she is – someone who cares for people and the planet," Klapatch-Mathias said.

Joan is grateful for the opportunity to work with students and other Don't Throw It, Donate It! volunteers through the years.

“Working with the students of UWRF is a breath of fresh air, not to mention motivating and fun,” Joan said. “They are committed to the River Falls community and sustainability. Their outstanding work ethic, time and talents are the reason for the success of this program.”

The move out collection was put on hold in 2020 and 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic. Joan wondered what it would look like when it resumed the following year, but collection totals in 2022 were strong and have continued to grow since.

While she is giving up overseeing Don't Throw It, Donate It!, Joan and Mike plan to stay involved with the effort that has become a two-decades-long labor of love. They are heartened to see how much the program has grown. They are grateful for the fact that so many items that would have gone to a landfill have instead found a useful place.

“My hope is that the passion for this program continues,” Joan said. “UW-River Falls is a special place and the passion of the people there will keep this effort going into the future.”

Documentary of UW college closures to be shown Nov. 1

Film creator Ken Brosky to lead discussion following screening

Oct. 24, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls will present a screening of "Closure: The Dismantling of Wisconsin's Colleges" created by Ken Brosky on Friday, Nov. 1, as part of the Contemporary Political Issues Roundtable Series.

The free public event is set for 2 p.m. in the Kinnickinnic Theater in the University Center, 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls.

The 90-minute film documents the closures and pending closures of some of Wisconsin's two-year colleges and questions the state's longstanding commitment to higher education. It also notes challenges faced by Wisconsin's public institutions. The screening will be followed by a discussion led by Brosky, a Milwaukee author, filmmaker and UW-Whitewater faculty member.

Brosky was inspired to document the shutdown of those colleges after the announcement that UW-Milwaukee at Waukesha is scheduled for closure in spring 2025. Armed with a camera and backed by a small Kickstarter project, he set out to capture closure-related events across Wisconsin, highlighting the impact on students, staff and communities.

For more information, email the Politics, Geography and International Studies Department at pgis@uwrf.edu.

Early childhood degree to move fully online in 2025

Change will allow for expansion to additional students

Oct. 17, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls will move its early childhood degree completion program fully online beginning in January 2025.

The program's change to an online delivery method is tailored to accommodate the diverse needs of working adults, transfer students and those who are balancing family commitments. The program combines UWRF's commitment to academic excellence with the convenience of online learning, allowing students to complete courses and field experiences close to home or work.

Students with existing college credits in early childhood education or child development may apply their credits toward a Bachelor of Science degree and optional Wisconsin early childhood teaching certificate.

The change to online only will officially happen on Jan. 27, 2025, the first day of spring semester at UWRF.

The program is designed to provide students with a flexible, high-quality education that meets the demands of working professionals, according to Molly Gerrish, early childhood program director. Offering fully online coursework will allow the program to expand its reach beyond the River Falls region, she said.

Students, faculty and staff worked together before moving the program online to reflect the changing needs of current and future students, she said.

"Our program is a great example of how UWRF strives to meet the needs of students, to honor their voices and to provide high-quality and accessible education," Gerrish said. "Our program will continue our history of excellence and best practices in the field of early childhood with hands-on opportunities for field-based placements, faculty with content expertise, and the convenience of an online program."

For more information about the program or to apply, visit uwrf.edu/MyDegree/EarlyChildhood.cfm, [view our program guide](#), email debra.hare@uwrf.edu or call 715-425-3557.

Emmy-winning art director to present public lecture and workshops

Sept. 26, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls will host a public lecture and student hands-on workshop series Oct. 7-11 by Emmy-winning art director [Elizabeth Steinberg](#), renowned for her expertise in motion design, branding and creative entrepreneurship.

Steinberg, originally from South Africa, has worked on high-profile campaigns for major companies including Microsoft, Apple TV, Netflix and Hulu.

Steinberg's free public lecture, "The Future of Creativity: How Advanced AI is Transforming Art, Motion Design, and Marketing," is Wednesday, Oct. 9, from 5:30-7 p.m. in North Hall Auditorium, Room 222. Steinberg will discuss the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the creative industries, focusing on its impact on art, design and branding.

In addition to the lecture, Steinberg will lead several specialized student workshops designed to introduce participants to AI's integration into the creative process. The theme is "Mastering the Future: AI, Art Across All Mediums, and Creative Entrepreneurship." Workshops include Unlocking AI Potential, Advanced AI, Motion Design, Creative Entrepreneurship and Digital Sculpting & 3D Modeling.

Steinberg co-founded the creative studio Martian & Sons and teaches motion design on her platform [Friends of Motion](#), where she continues to inspire designers and animators. With a career spanning work for brands like Disney, Motorola and Nat Geo, Steinberg's visit offers UW-River Falls students and the wider community invaluable insights into the intersection of creativity and technology.

For more information, email dan.paulus@uwrf.edu.



Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman, right, UWRF Interim Chancellor Mike Martin, left, and UW Board of Regents members present the Universities of Wisconsin Regents Business Partnership Award to Interfacial staff Monday at the company's Prescott headquarters, with founder and UWRF alum Jeff Cernohous joining remotely. The Universities of Wisconsin launched the award to recognize companies that positively impact Wisconsin through their collaboration with state universities. UWRF photo.

Interfacial recognized for its partnership with UW-River Falls

Company receives UW Regents Business Partnership Award

Oct. 22, 2024 – Jeffrey Cernohous couldn't attend a ceremony Monday in person recognizing Interfacial, the company he founded, but his affinity for the partnership between that business and the University of Wisconsin-River Falls was very much evident.

Interfacial received the Universities of Wisconsin Regents Business Partnership Award for its close working relationship with UWRF. The award, presented at Interfacial's Prescott headquarters, recognizes companies that make a significant, positive impact on UW schools and their communities. Last year WinField United received the award for its work with UWRF.

Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman presented the award along with UW Board of Regents Tim Nixon, Haben Goitom and Mark Tyler. In his opening remarks, Nixon called Interfacial "an integral part of the broader St. Croix Valley community" and said the award "recognizes that UW-River Falls can provide the employees that help drive success" and add skilled workers in Wisconsin.

Representing Interfacial and accepting the award in person were Jill Ferguson, executive director of technology commercialization; Andy Gillis, vice president of operations; and Nate Ockwig, research fellow. Cernohous, a 1993 UWRF graduate, appeared at the ceremony virtually and expressed gratitude for the award. He recalled many past instances in which Interfacial and UWRF partnered to help each other and how those collaborations benefitted both entities and the St. Croix Valley region.

Interfacial has hired numerous UWRF alumni and currently employs 16 university interns. The company produces compounds for customers in the medical, consumer, transportation, and construction markets.

Not all higher education institutions are flexible and work with businesses, Cernohous said. “But UW-River Falls has gone out of its way to find a way to bridge the gap,” he said. “They find ways to work with us, and that ultimately creates better outcomes for students and for our regional economy.”

Rothman praised Interfacial for partnering with UWRF to benefit the surrounding community. Providing students with internships and other learning opportunities represents a meaningful investment that builds the area’s economy, he said.

“This is an example of someone developing a business like this and changing this entire region,” Rothman said of Cernohous and Interfacial. “These students start with internships and they go on to have incredible careers because of the valuable experiential learning they receive.”

Partnerships between UW schools and businesses in communities where those schools are located are key to developing talent and building Wisconsin’s skilled workforce, Rothman said.

“We see ourselves as playing an important role as one of the key talent producers in our state,” he said. “If we are going to serve the state well, we need to collaborate closely with businesses like Interfacial.”

Interfacial’s impact on UWRF and the surrounding region is an example of positive outcomes that are possible when universities and companies can collaborate, Interim Chancellor Mike Martin said.

“Businesses like this mean a great deal to UW-River Falls,” Martin said. “They make a difference not only for themselves, but for others. That to me is the story of what great regional universities are about.”

Cernohous and his wife Kristi, ‘93, are playing another key role for their alma mater. Three years ago they were lead donors for UWRF’s Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech), scheduled to open in January 2026.

During Monday’s award ceremony, Rothman expressed surprise at how construction on SciTech has progressed. Cernohous said he is excited at the opportunities the building will provide as he seeks to continue his partnership with UWRF.

“We are really excited about SciTech and how we can increase what we are doing even further,” Cernohous said. “We want to continue to grow our collaboration and relationship with UW-River Falls to do even more for students and for our region.”



Michael Martin starts this academic year as interim chancellor at UW-River Falls, replacing his friend and former colleague Maria Gallo. Martin said he hopes to shepherd the university through budget difficulties and build on its many strengths. UWRF photo.

Interim chancellor brings five decades of experience to job

Oct. 7, 2024 - When Michael Martin sent an email message to his former colleague Maria Gallo in June, he hoped to speak as a guest lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, where Gallo was chancellor, while visiting family in the Twin Cities.

Instead, Martin finds himself leading the university, having been named interim chancellor by Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman on Aug. 1, when Gallo announced her retirement.

"I didn't expect to be leading this university," Martin said. "It certainly wasn't something that I planned on. But after talking about it with Maria, it seemed like maybe I could step up and help. I want to use my experience to help this university."

Martin followed his initial email exchange with Gallo with an in-person meeting at which Gallo told him she planned to retire. She was delaying her retirement until she could find an interim replacement she thought would be a good match for UWRF. After speaking with Martin about her plan to step down, she was convinced he was just the person to serve as interim. She recommended him to Rothman.

"He seems like the right fit at the right time," said Gallo, who worked with Martin at the University of Minnesota and the University of Florida. "Mike has all of this experience, so many situations that he has been through and dealt with. He has

pretty much seen it all. And he has a deep sense of the value of regional comprehensive universities like UWRF and the important role they play.”

Martin, 77, certainly has plenty of experience in higher education. During his 53 years in the field, Martin has served as president of New Mexico State University, chancellor at Louisiana State University and Colorado State University, and most recently as president of Florida Gulf Coast University.

In addition, he worked in numerous faculty and administrative jobs at the University of Minnesota and has Wisconsin connections, having started his education career as an economics teacher at UW-Eau Claire.

After a career that has involved leading four large universities, why take on the interim job at UWRF? Martin said he decided to work as interim chancellor in large part because of the important role of the university to students and to the surrounding community.

“I have developed this notion that the regional comprehensive universities like UWRF have taken up the mission to be the people’s universities,” he said. “Places like this play a profoundly important role in higher education. These smaller schools provide students with a ladder to a better life and career, and that benefits our society in so many ways.”

Martin praised UWRF’s faculty and programs as strengths. The Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) currently under construction and scheduled to open in January 2026 will provide new instruction, research and internship opportunities for students and will foster increased partnership opportunities between the university and businesses, he said. Being near the Twin Cities is an advantage, he said.

“There is a real affection for and a commitment to this university,” he said.

Martin knows firsthand the positive difference a regional university can make. He is a first-generation college student who got his higher education start at Minnesota State University, Mankato (then known as Mankato State University). UWRF plays a similar role for so many students to find success, he said.

“Places like UWRF are powerful engines in this state that don’t get enough credit for all they do,” Martin said. “We often worry too much about prestigious rankings. What I think is elite is taking a student with a 23 score on the ACT and turning out a graduate who is a high-quality employee and who makes a positive difference in society.”

Martin becomes interim chancellor at a challenging time. Like some other Universities of Wisconsin schools, UWRF faces budget cuts. Martin acknowledged the university’s financial difficulties and the possibility of layoffs and program reductions. New revenues would reduce cutback amounts, he said, noting some universities are outsourcing parts of operations that are not a part of their core mission.

“There are challenges here to be sure,” he said. “I don’t want to minimize that. But we are in better shape than a lot of universities around the country. I think we have real opportunities here.”

Among those, Martin said, is continuing to build on two successive years of increased first-year student enrollment. Higher student numbers, combined with improved retention efforts, will go a long way toward improving the bottom line, he said. Continuing to offer strong academic programs and creating new ones will help attract students.

“I am honored to have this opportunity to work with talented people here at UWRF,” Martin said. “If, while I’m here, I can help move this institution a bit further toward the bright future we have ahead of us, that is a contribution I want to make.”



The UW-River Falls Society of Physics students will open the UWRF observatory for free public stargazing on Monday, Oct. 7, from 8-10 p.m. All ages are welcome. UWRF file photo.

Next public telescope session Oct. 7

Sept. 30, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls Society of Physics students will host a free open telescope session on Monday, Oct. 7, from 8-10 p.m. All ages are welcome.

A waxing crescent Moon will provide nice shadows for features to be seen by those arriving early, otherwise gaze at Saturn and its beautiful rings nearly edge-on, globular star clusters, the Andromeda galaxy, binary stars, and hope to be lucky enough to witness a rare (every 80 years) nova in T Coronae Borealis, predicted with 95% chance to go nuclear sometime this Fall.

Extra telescopes will be set up out in the grass below the observatory deck to avoid any long waiting in line up the stairs to the dome.

Faculty and students will be on hand to point the telescopes and answer any questions about what you see, point out prominent constellations and specific bright stars.

The UWRF observatory is located on the south side of Centennial Science Hall, 511 S. 6th St., River Falls. Enter the building through that south door and take the elevator or stairs up to the third floor observatory lobby then go outside into the dome or out on the observing deck.

For more information, visit uwrf.edu/PHYS/Observatory.cfm.

State Building Commission authorizes funds to address needs

Dollars will renovate ag program labs, replace chilled water system

Oct. 16, 2024 - Students at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls will have improved learning opportunities and the university's athletic facility will receive an upgrade, thanks to funding approved earlier this month by the State Building Commission.

The commission on Wednesday approved \$160.8 million in projects at Universities of Wisconsin schools and in communities across the state. The expenditures approved by the commission include \$50 million for 50 projects that are part of the Non-State Grant Program included in the 2023-25 state budget to address critical infrastructure needs.

Included in that funding is \$2.69 million to renovate laboratories in UWRF's geology, conservation, engineering, and engineering technology programs.

The remodeled engineering and engineering technology labs made possible by state dollars will separate existing lab spaces from classrooms and will allow students to work independently while classes are taught, according to Joel Peterson, professor and department chair of agricultural engineering technology.

In addition, the remodeling will allow for such improvements as a walk-in fume hood in the thermal processing lab, where students will be able to conduct hands-on experiments on subjects like conversion of biomass to fuel; floor drains so students can study rainfall and runoff processes; a separate soil grinding room in the soil and water engineering lab; and dedicated space for student clubs, he said.

"Renovation of the two laboratory classrooms will have a very positive effect on student learning," Peterson said.

Renovations in the geology and conservation labs will have a similarly positive impact on enhancing students' educations, according to Holly Dolliver, geology and soil science professor and chair of the Plant and Earth Science Department.

"The renovation of these spaces will enhance and expand high impact and experiential learning opportunities for students," Dolliver said.

The commission also approved \$732,200 to connect Knowles Field House to the Falcon Center chilled water system. Those dollars are critical for removing the current cooling system for Knowles Field House and connecting that facility to the Falcon Center's chilled water system, according to Alan Symicek, chief facilities officer.

"This will provide reliable equipment to condition the air inside this heavily used multi-purpose facility," Symicek said.



Steve Kelm, chair of the UW-River Falls Animal and Food Science Department and a professor of animal and dairy science, discussed aspects of caring for dairy cows with students enrolled in the university's Farm and Industry Short Course on Oct. 25, 2023. The university's dairy science and animal science programs have been ranked first and second, respectively, by College Raptor, a college search and comparison organization. UWRF file photo

Agriculture programs ranked first, second nationally in college ratings

Dairy science, animal science programs, along with others, recognized for excellent instruction and outcomes

Oct. 25, 2024 – Agriculture programs at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls have placed first and second nationally in recent college rankings, evidence of the university's renowned agriculture coursework.

The university's dairy science program is the top program of its kind among U.S. colleges, according to College Raptor, a college search and comparison organization. UWRF placed second nationally in the Best Colleges for Animal Science, General category, placing behind only Kansas State and ahead of larger universities well known for their strong agriculture programs.

UWRF received high national rankings in other categories as well. The university ranked seventh in the agriculture teacher education category, 17th in agronomy and crop science, 35th in food science, and 62nd in the Best College for Agriculture category.

The rankings are based on multiple factors, including the number of degrees awarded, acceptance rate, the cost of attending college, and median starting salary.

Mike Orth, dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES), said the high rankings for the university's agriculture programs are a sign of UWRF's top-notch instruction and coursework. Hands-on learning opportunities in ag programs provide students with a more thorough understanding of topics, he said.

"These rankings are a testament to the great faculty and staff that make sure our students receive a high-impact, experiential learning-based education both in and outside the classroom," Orth said.

Student success is nothing new for CAFES students. UWRF is well known nationally for its strong agriculture programs and its students routinely place well at national ag-related competitions, often outperforming students from larger, more acclaimed schools.

Steve Kelm, chair of UWRF's Animal and Food Science Department and a professor of animal and dairy science, said students in the university's agriculture programs benefit from a strong curriculum and faculty who are dedicated to enabling students to achieve their full potential. Their approach of striving for excellence has led to UWRF consistently ranking as one of the nation's top agriculture schools, alongside such larger, acclaimed programs as Kansas State, Iowa State and Penn State.

"My colleagues have a strong and genuine interest in the students who we work with every day," Kelm said. "Our faculty and staff put a lot of time and effort into teaching and preparing students for their next stage in life, wherever that may be."

UWRF students receive a high value for the cost of their education, Orth said, noting that attending UWRF costs less than many other Wisconsin colleges and universities. According to College Raptor figures, the median starting salary for UWRF graduates tops \$58,000.

"We provide this high-quality education at a very reasonable cost," Orth said.

UW-River Falls student named one of six National FFA officers

Platform provides opportunity to extol the value of agriculture to a large audience

Oct. 29, 2024 – Mary Schrieber, a junior at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, has been elected to one of six National FFA Organization officer team positions, a prestigious distinction she called “the honor of a lifetime.”



Schrieber joined her FFA colleagues from Illinois, Ohio, Kentucky, California, and Georgia who were elected by National FFA delegates to serve as 2024-25 National FFA officers. The group, who will lead the organization for the next year, was selected from among 37 applicants on Saturday during the final session of the 97th National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis.

“I am really, really honored and humbled,” Schrieber, 20, said of her selection as a National FFA officer. “When it was announced that I had been selected, it was pretty much just pure shock and joy.”

Schrieber’s selection as a National FFA leader is especially notable given that she didn’t grow up on a farm or with an agricultural background. She spent her childhood in the suburban community of East Troy in southeast Wisconsin and got her start in agriculture in eighth grade, when she was urged to join her school’s FFA chapter and she participated in Middle School Quiz Bowl, a

competition that tests participants’ knowledge of ag-related topics.

“Before that, I couldn’t tell you what FFA even was,” Schrieber recalled. “Then I took part in that competition, and I loved it. After that, I was hooked. I wanted to be part of FFA.”

In ensuing years Schrieber became increasingly involved in FFA, learning as much about various aspects of agriculture as she could. She got involved at the state level as well, serving as the Wisconsin FFA state sentinel in 2022-23 and as the organization’s president in 2023-24.

Schrieber attended UW-Madison her freshman year, then transferred to UWRF because she said the school offers her better opportunities in her major, agricultural education, and to study agriculture policy development. She praised the quality of agriculture education at UWRF and said she is thankful for the support of faculty and her fellow students as she pursues FFA opportunities.

“I have a lot of really great opportunities at UW-River Falls,” she said. “This place has been a really good fit for me.”

During her year as a National FFA officer, Schrieber will travel across the country, interacting with business and industry leaders, thousands of FFA members and teachers, corporate partners, government and education officials, state FFA leaders, and others. She will help lead personal growth and leadership training conferences for FFA members and help set

policies to guide the future of FFA and the next generation of leaders.

“I am so excited to continue to educate and talk about the importance of agriculture, and now I have a bigger platform to do that,” Schrieber said. “I will be doing that with the next generation of agriculture that will take on the challenges that our industry faces.”

UWRF junior Amy Jentges, an ag education major from Port Washington, served as a Wisconsin FFA officer with Schrieber last year. She watched Schrieber develop her leadership skills as president of the state FFA, work that prepared her for being a National FFA officer.

Schrieber exudes an inclusive leadership style, Jentges said, that “includes cultivating a sense of belonging and friendship wherever she goes.”

Schrieber said she is driven to connect with others about the importance of agriculture and food because of her own experience and her lack of a traditional agriculture background. Many Americans don’t understand where their food comes from, she said, and don’t understand the challenges that agriculture faces. She wants to change that.

“For a time, I perceived my lack of experience in agriculture as something to hide,” she said. “But the people in this industry made me realize that FFA was somewhere where I really belong. That’s why I decided to run for national office, to inspire other people that they can belong in ag too.”



Toni Mattson, co-owner and director of programs at Trinity Equestrian Center in Eau Claire, speaks during the Veterans Day ceremony at UW-River Falls on Nov. 9, 2023. This year's ceremony, on Nov. 6, will feature Patriot K9s of Wisconsin, a nonprofit organization based in Wausau that trains psychiatric service dogs and pairs them with veterans in need of assistance. UWRF file photo.

UW-River Falls to host Nov. 6 Veterans Day ceremony

University's Veteran Services Office to sponsor open house Nov. 11

Oct. 28, 2024 – When UWRF Veterans Services Coordinator Cheryl Grubb learned about a program that links dogs with military veterans who are experiencing emotional and physical health needs, she thought bringing it to the University of Wisconsin-River Falls for a Veterans Day ceremony would be a perfect fit.

UWRF is home to Falcon FETCH, an assistance dog training program started last year in partnership with Can Do Canines out of New Hope, Minn. As part of that program, students live with dogs on campus, training them to be assistance dogs, a role in which they help people with emotional and physical health needs.

After seeing the positive difference assistance dogs can make in people's lives, Grubb decided to bring Patriot K9s of Wisconsin to campus for this year's Veterans Day event. The ceremony will take place from 11 a.m. to noon on Wednesday, Nov. 6, in the Falcon's Nest in the University Center, 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls. The event is sponsored by the university's Veterans Services Office and is free to the public.

Patriot K9s of Wisconsin, a nonprofit organization based in Wausau, trains psychiatric service dogs and pairs them with veterans who are impacted by military related post-traumatic stress, have suffered a traumatic brain injury, or have experienced military sexual trauma. Veterans don't pay for their service dog provided through the program.

"I thought with the university's program for assistance dog training and the Patriot K9s training program, it would be an ideal fit for our campus," Grubb said.

The UWRF Veteran Services Office will also host an open house from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 11, (Veterans Day) in the Veterans Lounge in Room 283 Rodli Hall, 512 S. 6th St., River Falls. The public is invited.

Patriot K9s of Wisconsin was established in 2017 to assist veterans by increasing services such as mental health screening to improve veterans' health and reduce veteran suicides. Since it began, the organization has graduated 94 service dog teams and has provided services to more than 100 veterans.

"We are dedicated to providing assistance and guidance to veterans in various aspects of their lives," the organization's website states.

Psychiatric service dogs can play a vital role in helping veterans transition from their time in the military to civilian life, Grubb said.

"Service dogs offer veterans improved quality of life and assistance with their mental health," she said. "Dogs are amazing creatures and offer companionship and unconditional love."

and both secretary and deputy secretary for former Gov. Jim Doyle.

As DATCP secretary, Romanski has focused on such issues as farmland preservation, local foods, the Farm to School program, and renewable energy. He earned his bachelor's degree in political science at UWRF and his master's degree in public policy and administration from the Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs at UW-Madison.

Nilsestuen was Wisconsin DATCP secretary at the time of his death in July 2010. He is remembered as a proud steward of sustainable agriculture and a leader in the national cooperative movement who strove to balance the needs of sustainable land use with the maximization of agricultural production.

Nilsestuen worked to find common ground on topics such as the power of cooperatives, farmland conservation, the future of rural America and the increased pressure on agriculture to feed the world.

The Rod Nilsestuen Fund was established by friends, family, colleagues, and several land conservation and cooperative organizations. It is part of the Ralph K. Morris Foundation, an organization that shares Nilsestuen's dedication to cooperatives and leadership development.



Charlie Theis, left, began his athletic career at UW-River Falls competing in track & field and this fall has also been an important member of the university's first-ever men's soccer team. He will compete in track & field in the upcoming winter and spring. UWRF photo

Dual Threat: UW-River Falls athlete excels on both the track and the pitch

Charlie Theis adds soccer team participation to his track & field exploits

Nov. 13, 2024 - University of Wisconsin-River Falls dual-sport athlete Charlie Theis has had far from the typical college athletics experience.

Theis, who is entering his fifth season as an athlete on the UWRF track & field team, embarked on a new challenge this year in being a member of the inaugural men's soccer team at UW-River Falls. The graduate student from Shakopee, Minn., is one of five seniors on the team, which is made up of 15 freshmen, nine transfers, and three athletes previously enrolled at UWRF.

"I just never thought I'd be able to be a part of something like this," Theis said. "It's something that I'm very fortunate to be a part of."

Theis began his athletics career at a young age, when soccer was his top sport of choice, and eventually competed in both track and soccer in high school. He was recruited to UWRF to compete on the track & field team, where he has primarily

competed in multi-events, hurdles, and jumps.

Theis represented UWRF at the 2024 Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) Outdoor Championships, where he was the team's top finisher in the decathlon. He ranks seventh in the UWRF record book in indoor triple jump (13.34m), 10th in outdoor long jump (6.47m), and sixth in outdoor triple jump (13.44m).

After leaving soccer behind in high school to pursue his track career, Theis figured his days of competitive soccer were behind him. As it turns out, that was not the case.

During his time at UWRF, Theis competed on the men's soccer club team, where soccer was only viewed as a hobby. When the university announced the creation of an officially sponsored men's soccer program, Theis was one of many club players looking for an opportunity to join the newly created team. He earned his way onto the team after an impressive showing at the team's camp workouts.

"Pretty soon after that we offered Charlie a spot because he's strong, he's fast, he's a competitor, he's mature and has experience," UWRF Men's Soccer Coach Evan Sassano said. "He was a great addition, and we feel lucky that he was around and interested in playing soccer as well as track."

'A quiet leader'

While Theis worked to elevate his soccer skills as needed to compete at the collegiate level, he noted the biggest challenges were adjusting to the speed of the game and regaining his touch with the ball.

"With Charlie, it's not only his athleticism, but he also has a great work rate," Sassano said. "Some players that are very athletic don't have the desire to be physical. Charlie likes to be physical and uses his strengths well."

That speed and physicality can be linked to his experience on the track, where Theis has competed in more than 15 different events across indoor and outdoor track & field. In addition to his performance on the track and soccer field, his coaches noted that Theis' leadership style inspires his teammates through actions more than words, a valuable role of an athlete in any sport.

"Charlie is a quiet leader, leading by example, showing up day in and day out giving his best effort to constantly improve," UWRF Director of Cross Country and Track & Field Andy Eggerth said.

"He knows how to manage his time very well. He knows what to put in his body as an athlete, and how to organize your classes and be diligent about the time that you have," Sassano said. "That was something that was very important. We have a lot of freshmen, and we are all relatively new."

The Falcons soccer team opened the season with a resounding 3-1 win over Crown College in the program's first-ever match. UWRF compiled an overall regular season record of 7-10 and went 3-2 in WIAC play to secure the No. 3 seed in the conference tournament with home field advantage in the first round. Midway through the season, the Falcons embarked on a four-game winning streak, which included victories over UW-Whitewater and UW-Stevens Point in the program's first official

WIAC matches. In the first round of the WIAC Tournament on Nov. 6, the Falcons defeated UW-Stout 3-0 at home to move on to the WIAC Semifinals. Theis has logged 636 minutes this season, including 17 appearances and six starts. He has tallied 17 shots and five shots on goal.

"It's been an amazing season so far. To play some of the harder teams early that are nationally ranked and see those high-intensity teams early in the season was very nice," Theis said. "As the season went on, we were able to pick up wins and experience success, so now we're ready to go into the playoffs and give it our all."

With any new team, there are question marks of how a season will fare on and off the field. For Theis and the members of the UWRF men's soccer team, embracing those challenges has been a key part of this year's experience, and has helped build team camaraderie among a group of athletes who were primarily strangers just four months ago.

"Going through the ups and downs together has been really nice," Theis said. "Being able to meet people from different countries is really cool too."

Unexpected opportunity

While Theis knows that his collegiate soccer career will come to an end after this season, he noted that a large part of his role on this year's team was to help build a foundation for success moving forward.

"I think we're headed in a great direction," Theis said. "I think the athletic department did a great job hiring the right coaches for this team and moving forward we're going to be able to keep the ball rolling and keep building."

"I can't say enough to the players that have come in with the understanding that they are looking at something beyond just this year," Sassano said. "I give them so much credit for having the mindset that they are a part of building this program."

As the UWRF soccer season nears its close, Theis will quickly move his focus fully back to track & field as the 2024-25 indoor season approaches. The grad student enters track season with the expectation of building on the positive progress he saw in the back half of last season.

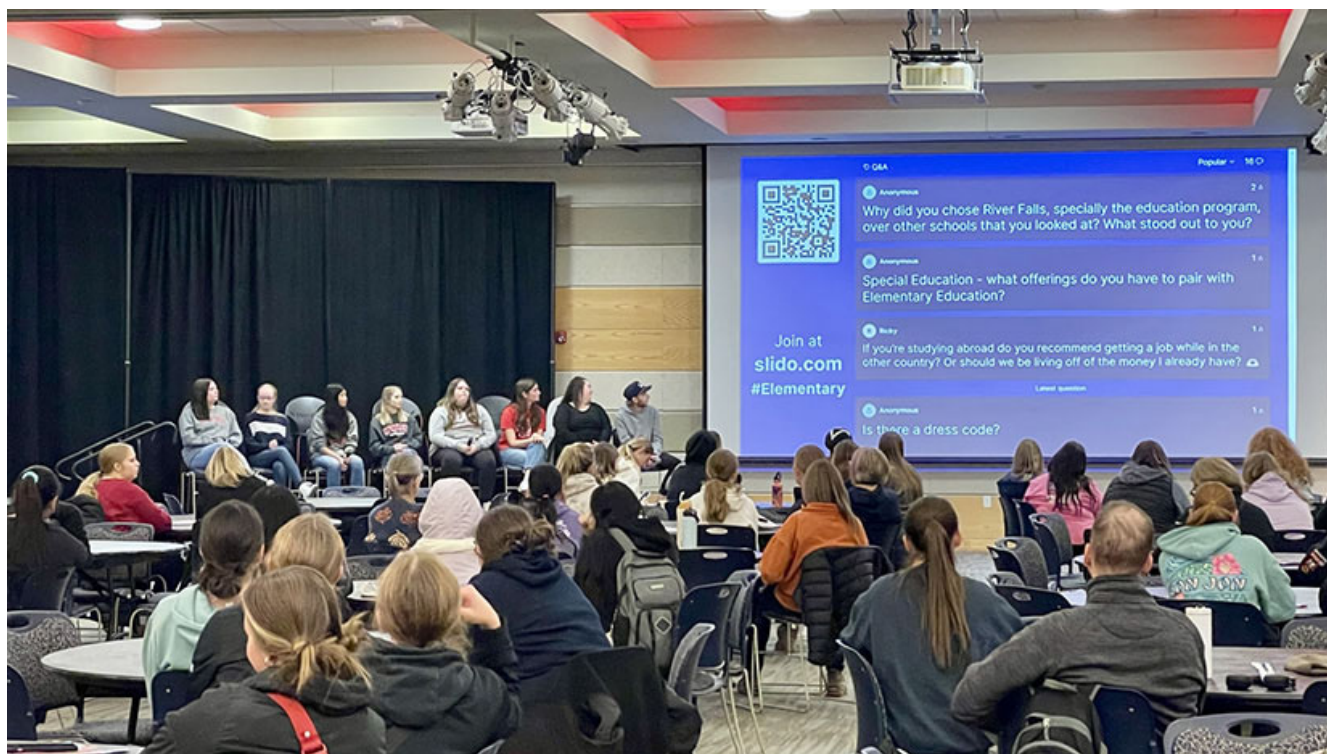
"I'm really excited to keep working on the field events. Last year I figured out a lot late in the season in pole vault and I just wanted the season to be a little bit longer to keep seeing that improvement," Theis said. "I'm excited to get back into those field events and try to pick up where I left off."

"Last season was only Charlie's second season training for the combined events, so he's still very young as far as his training age, but this is where you see exponential improvement and Charlie should be set for a fun season," Eggerth said.

When he is finished with athletics at UWRF, Theis said he will look back fondly on his commitment to Falcons sports and the opportunity to be part of both the track & field program and the university's first-ever men's soccer team.

"It never even occurred to me going into college that I'd be playing two sports," Theis said. "I had always looked at it as one or the other, so to look back at this when it's done, I think it worked out perfectly. I think about it a lot and I wouldn't change

one thing."



Attendees of Future Teacher Day at UW-River Falls on Nov. 1 learned about the teaching profession and educational pathways to becoming an educator. More than 250 high school students, faculty and staff from across the region attended the event.

Future Teacher Day sparks inspiration among aspiring educators

Nov. 11, 2024 – The University of Wisconsin-River Falls recently hosted a successful Future Teacher Day, attracting more than 250 high school students, faculty and staff from across the region.

The November 1 event was organized by the UWRF College of Education, Business and Allied Health's (CEBAH) School of Education and UWRF Admissions.

As UWRF celebrates 150 years of excellence in teacher education, this event offered aspiring educators an opportunity to explore the teaching profession and learn about pathways to becoming leaders in education. Future Teacher Day included workshops, panel discussions and informative sessions aimed at providing participants with an in-depth look at the teaching profession.

In addition, attendees heard from UWRF professors and teacher candidates who shared their journeys and experiences in teacher preparation programs.

"As we celebrate 150 years of teaching teachers, we are proud to continue UWRF's tradition of shaping the future of education," said Stacy Furness, CEBAH associate dean. "Future Teacher Day allows us to share our passion for teaching

and demonstrate the vital role educators play in shaping our communities. This visit day is a reminder of the essential role teachers play in shaping the future.”

In support of its mission to inspire and cultivate future educators, UWRF provided resources and information about scholarships, academic advising and campus support systems. Students and their guests left Future Teacher Day with a clearer understanding of what it takes to become an educator and a strong sense of the supportive community UWRF provides for education majors.

The success of Future Teacher Day confirms UWRF’s commitment to fostering the next generation of teachers and demonstrates the university’s proactive approach in addressing the ongoing need for quality educators.

For more information or to schedule a tour, visit uwrf.edu or call 715-425-3911.



Lani Rethaber, executive director of Patriot K9s of Wisconsin, stands next to his German Shepherd Aisa as UW-River Falls student Michaela Hasapopoulos, left, sings the national anthem at the beginning of a Veterans Day ceremony at the university Wednesday.

Paws for a cause: Veterans Day speaker highlights the positive impact of service dogs

Patriot K9s of Wisconsin has assisted more than 100 veterans and continues to grow

Nov. 6, 2024 – After stints in the Marine Corps and the Wisconsin Army National Guard, Lani Rethaber found himself feeling a mix of anger and depression, emotions that often prevented him from socializing.

Then Rethaber found the emotional support he needed in the form of man's best friend.

Rethaber trained dogs as a hobby. As he trained a dog named Max, Rethaber noticed his anxiety drop and his happiness increase.

"When I was with Max, I started finding out I could do things with him that I wasn't able to do before," Rethaber said. "Before, when people invited me places, I would say 'Nope, not going to go. Too many people. I just don't want to be around it.' But having Max there, suddenly I was able to go places and be around people. Just having the dog with me made such a big difference."

Rethaber relayed his story of the positive difference dogs can make during a Veterans Day ceremony at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls on Wednesday. Since 2021 he has been executive director of Patriot K9s of Wisconsin, a nonprofit organization based in Wausau that trains psychiatric service dogs and pairs them with veterans who are impacted by military-related post-traumatic stress, have suffered a traumatic brain injury or have experienced military sexual trauma. Veterans don't pay for their service dog provided by the program.

Patriot K9s of Wisconsin was established in 2017 to assist veterans by increasing services such as mental health screenings to improve veterans' health and reduce suicides. Since it was founded, the organization has graduated 103 teams of service dogs paired with veterans.

As part of the K9s of Wisconsin program, veterans receive instruction aligned with dogs' training in which veterans and dogs go out in public together. That effort helps to not only train dogs, but enables veterans to acclimate to being in public places they might otherwise avoid.

"We are helping them get used to being out in the world again," Rethaber told attendees at the event. "Veterans' mental health is much better when they're a part of their community."

Rethaber got linked to Patriot K9s of Wisconsin when he organized a fundraiser for the organization in 2018. He was attracted to its mission and decided to volunteer, then became an employee and now heads the organization. Today, the organization employs eight staff and has between 50 and 60 volunteers at any given time.

Rethaber recounted veteran friends he has lost to suicide, losses he said drive him to link more trained service dogs with veterans in need to prevent additional suicides.

Joe Kmiech, UWRF chief information officer, is a veteran who oversaw Wednesday's ceremony. He said the commitment of Rethaber and Patriot K9s of Wisconsin is a tangible way to help veterans who have served their country.

"We need to remember our veterans and their service, not just today, but every day," Kmiech said.

Following the ceremony, Rethaber stood next to Aisa, his 3-year-old German Shepherd. He recounted personal stories of veterans and the difference service dogs and Patriot K9s of Wisconsin have made in their lives. Veterans' families share similar tales of the program's positive impact.

"When vets come in our door, they're not smiling, they're not happy," Rethaber said. "Then, after they are paired with a dog, they are smiling. They describe how their dogs make their lives so much better. It's super powerful stuff that reminds me why I am doing this."



UW-River Falls students, from left, Duncan Keuning, Nicole Osness, and Luke Heggestad were among the university's Professional Sales Club members who participated in the International Collegiate Sales Competition Oct. 30-Nov. 2 in Orlando, Fla.

Professional Sales Club members compete at International Collegiate Sales Competition

Student participants in event learn important skills to build their sales careers

Nov. 12, 2024 – University of Wisconsin-River Falls Professional Sales Club members represented the university at the recent International Collegiate Sales Competition (ICSC) in Orlando, Fla., a global event that challenges students to showcase their skills in relationship building, sales strategy and persuasive presentations.

The UWRF participants are marketing professional sales majors in the College of Education, Business and Allied Health (CEBAH) and participated in three primary categories: a role-play event, a sales management case event and a speed-selling event.

In the role-play event, students engaged in scenarios that focused on relationship development and customer needs assessment. This event allowed participants to practice interpersonal skills that are essential to success in sales careers.

The sales management case event presented students with complex sales management scenarios that required them to solve real-world business challenges. Participants demonstrated their ability to manage resources, motivate sales teams and

achieve business objectives.

The fast-paced speed-selling competition allowed students to present concise, persuasive sales pitches showcasing their personal brand. In the "elevator pitch" format, students learned to communicate clearly under time constraints, a vital skill in the business world.

Ozcan Kilic, the club's faculty adviser and a marketing professor in the School of Business and Economics, said students participating in the competition learned hands-on, real-world sales experience and had the chance to network with industry leaders. Those opportunities offer students learning beyond what they receive in the classroom, Kilic said, and establish UWRF as a leader in sales education.

"Participating in the ICSC in Orlando is not only a transformative, powerful growth experience for our sales team but also a vital step toward our vision for sales education at UWRF," Kilic said. "This competition not only enhances our students' growth and potential but also elevates the university's reputation in the field of sales education, showing that UWRF is committed to fostering top talent in a highly competitive industry."

UWRF's participation in the competition reflects the university's commitment to preparing students for successful careers in sales and business, Kilic said. In addition to gaining national recognition, students can make connections with potential employers, laying the groundwork for internships and post-graduation opportunities.

For more information on the Professional Sales Club or the marketing program, contact Kilic at ozcan.kilic@uwrf.edu, or visit uwrf.edu/programs/marketing-professional-sales.

Renowned author, scholar to speak about digital platforms and marginalized populations

Nov. 8, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls is proud to announce Safiya Noble as the featured speaker of one of this year's Walker D. and Helen Bryant Wyman Visiting Professorship events.



Noble, a renowned scholar, author, and professor, will deliver presentations on her acclaimed best-selling book *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*.

A public fireside chat with Noble will take place from 4-5:30 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 21 in the Kinnickinnic River Theater in the University Center on the UW-River Falls campus. A reception will follow. The event is free and open to the public.

Noble's research explores the ways in which digital platforms, particularly search engines, can perpetuate systemic racism and bias and often amplify harmful stereotypes. *Algorithms of Oppression* offers a critical analysis of the power dynamics behind technology and its impact on marginalized communities.

As a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and co-founder of the UCLA Center for Critical Internet Inquiry, Noble has become a leading voice in discussions about equity in the digital age.

For more information about the event, contact Moira Lynch at moira.lynch@uwrf.edu.

Students plan annual fundraiser to help families in need

Proceeds from event will be donated to River Falls Sunshine Fund

Nov. 21, 2024 - Students in a University of Wisconsin-River Falls marketing communications class are learning more about the profession they're studying while helping families in need.

Students in the Sales Promotions and Event Planning course taught by David Bonko, an associate professor and director of the university's marketing communications program, are planning the Fourth Annual Gift & Thrift event on campus, an effort to help families needing financial assistance.

The student-led event consists of a thrift store at which donated clothing will be sold. It will take place from 3-7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 5, in the Falcon's Nest at the University Center, E. 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls. Donated clothing will include jackets, shoes, shirts and pants.

A silent auction will occur throughout the event. The UWRF Marching Falcons will provide entertainment from 5:15–5:35 p.m. All profits from clothing sales will be donated to the [River Falls Sunshine Fund](#), an organization that assists people experiencing financial hardship.

"Participating in the Fourth Annual Gift and Thrift event has been an incredibly rewarding experience," said Brooke Zitzloff, a junior from Delano, Minn., who is majoring in marketing communications. "Through the Sales Promotion and Event Planning course, we've gained valuable hands-on experience in various aspects of event planning, helping us develop new skills and uncover what truly ignites our passion."

Sales Promotions and Event Planning class members are seeking donations, including financial help, clothing, and silent auction items. Those seeking to donate should contact kate.garbow@my.uwrf.edu. Digital cash donations can be made via Venmo at [gift-thrift-and-silent-auction.square.site](https://www.venmo.com/gift-thrift-and-silent-auction).

The event is sponsored by River City Stitch, Citizens State Bank, Game Quest Gaming, Freeman Drug, Leitch Insurance Agency, Tarnation Tavern, The Table on Main and The Garage Bikes + Brews.

For more information, contact nolan.arechigo@my.uwrf.edu.



Eleven UW-River Falls students recently participated in the national meeting of the Students of Agronomy, Soils and Environmental Sciences meeting in San Antonio, Texas, where they won two first-place awards and a third-place award. From left are Yoana Newman, professor of crop science and team adviser, students Jordan Hellenbrand, Suzanne Myers, Jenna Dedina, Heather Hatfull, August Roach, Megan Culpitt, Hannah Schull, Elayna Stirn, Evan Zachow, and Brandt Berghuis, assistant professor of crop science and team adviser. Not pictured are students Austyn Steinhaus and Austin Meade. Contributed photo

Students receive two first-place awards at national agriculture competition

Participants credit their strong performance to dedicated faculty members

Nov. 25, 2024 - Students at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls displayed their acumen for agriculture at a recent national competition, placing first in two categories and topping their competitors from across the nation.

Eleven UWRF students participated in the national meeting of Students of Agronomy, Soils, and Environmental Sciences (SASES) Nov. 10-12 in San Antonio, Texas. They took part in multiple competitions, placing first among 26 teams in the Quiz Bowl, and received first- and third-place awards in the poster contest.

The Quiz Bowl queries student teams about a variety of agriculture and environmental topics. UWRF Quiz Bowl team members are Heather Hatfull, a junior from Lakeville, Minn., majoring in crop and soil science; Hannah Schull, a junior from Medford majoring crop and soil science; Megan Culpitt, a senior from Norwalk majoring in crop and soil science; and August

Roach, a senior from Faribault, Minn., majoring in agricultural business.

UWRF student Elayna Stirn, a senior from Fitchburg majoring in horticulture, placed first in the poster contest, in the crop disease, pest and weed control category. Her classmate Austin Meade, a junior from Hudson majoring in crop and soil science, placed third in that category. Nine UWRF students made poster presentations and two represented the Crops and Soils Club with an oral presentation.

“This outcome is a testament to the preparation that our students are getting in the Plant and Earth Science Department,” said Yoana Newman, professor of crop science who, along with Brandt Berghuis, assistant professor of crop science, advised UWRF students participating in SASES.

Other students participating in SASES include Evan Zachow, a senior biology major from Eau Claire; Jenna Dedina, a senior from McHenry, Ill., majoring in horticulture; Suzanne Myers, a non-degree seeking student from St. Paul, Minn.; Austyn Steinhaus, a junior from Cokato, Minn., majoring in crop and soil science; and Jordan Hellenbrand, a senior from Sun Prairie majoring in crop and soil science.

Students said they enjoyed the opportunity to showcase their skills. Their high placement in competitions is evidence of the quality instruction they receive at UWRF, they said, noting that their professors are dedicated to ensuring their success.

As the Quiz Bowl competition progressed and the UWRF team excelled, Stirn and her colleagues watching the event discussed answers to the questions posed during the competition.

“We would’ve crushed it no matter which of us were on the team,” Stirn said. “Every question that was asked, at least two or three of us knew the answer. We really have our amazing professors here in the Plant and Earth Science Department to thank for that.”

Stirn’s poster presentation detailed how photosynthetic efficiency of peas is impacted when peas are inoculated by the fungal pathogen pea rust. She has researched the topic for the past two years, seeking ways to improve the efficiency of growing peas. She used a series of photos to connect those hearing her poster presentation to her work.

“For me, the most important part of science is communication,” she said. “I wanted my poster to be as simple and clear as possible with more pictures than words. The poster is used as a visual to support what your audience wants to hear from you.”

Students attending SASES took part in academic competitions, participated in learning sessions and met prospective employers and graduate program representatives. They also toured the surrounding area, visiting such sites as a pecan farm, San Antonio Botanical Garden, San Antonio’s Historic Market Square, and the city’s celebrated River Walk.

“They were all very professional in their demeanor, and that attracted the attention of many visitors to each of their posters and recruiters for graduate school of big-name universities,” Newman said of UWRF students. “They really made the most of their opportunity.”

Unique gifts available at annual art sale

Event raises money to support scholarships for student artists

Nov. 26, 2024 - People seeking one-of-a-kind gifts for the holidays are likely to find what they're looking for at the upcoming annual Art Department Scholarship Sale at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Those purchases will result in hand-made gifts and will also help aspiring young artists. All sale proceeds directly support UWRF art student scholarships.

The sale begins Monday, Dec. 2, and continues through Sunday, Dec. 8. It takes place in the E.H. Kleinpell Fine Art building, Gallery 101. The sale will be open to the public from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Dec. 2-Friday, Dec. 6; 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 7; and 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 8.

This year's sale features a silent auction showcasing works donated by Art Department faculty and friends. The sale also includes a blown glass ornament-making event in which participants can create their own ornaments. That event occurs at 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 7, and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 8, in E.H. Kleinpell Fine Arts building Room 163. The cost is \$25 per ornament.

Admittance to the sale is free, and the public is invited. For more information, email michael.helke@uwrf.edu.

UW-River Falls celebrates the holiday season with vintage musical, 'A 1940s Radio Christmas Carol'

Nov. 21, 2024 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls Music and Stage and Screen Arts Department invites the community to experience a heartwarming holiday treat with its presentation of "A 1940s Radio Christmas Carol."

The production has multiple showtimes: 7:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 6; 2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 7 and Sunday, Dec. 8; 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 11, Thursday, Dec. 12, and Friday, Dec. 13. All performances will take place in Blanche Davis Theatre in the E. H. Kleinpell Fine Arts Building, 420 E. Cascade Ave., River Falls.

This festive production, set during Christmas Eve 1943, offers a nostalgic and comedic take on Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," reimagined within the world of a 1940s radio broadcast.

The play follows a ragtag radio troupe struggling to tell the timeless tale of Ebenezer Scrooge. When the group's lead actor becomes overwhelmed with grief for his son who died in the war, the panicked cast improvises a detective noir radio show with hilarious results.

Audiences can expect classic Christmas carols, jazzy 1940s tunes, and a heartfelt story that appeals to all ages.

The cast and musicians, comprised of UWRF students, will bring this production to life under the artistic direction of UWRF faculty. Director Kathy Welch, Music Director Casey Palbicki, Vocal Director Momoko Tanno and Scenic Designer Kyle Gettelman, lead the production.

Tickets cost \$15 for adults, \$10 for children and seniors, and \$5 for UWRF students. They can be purchased at the box office starting one hour prior to each performance, or online at www.uwrf.edu/SASA/UniversityTheatre/OrderTickets.cfm.

UW-River Falls to host Celebrating Our Montessori Children Conference on Jan. 18

Event dedicated to peace, community and the Montessori mission

Nov. 18, 2024 - Montessori educators, administrators, parents and school leaders are invited to the 11th annual Celebrating Our Montessori Children Conference at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, an event intended to highlight the Montessori education method, with a focus on community and peace.

The conference is scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 18, at UWRF's University Center, E. 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls. Attendees are urged to register by Sunday, Dec. 1 for early pricing options.

This year's conference brings together Montessori communities from across the region for a full day of insightful workshops, inspiring speakers, and collaborative learning under the theme, "Joining the Pieces Together for Peace."

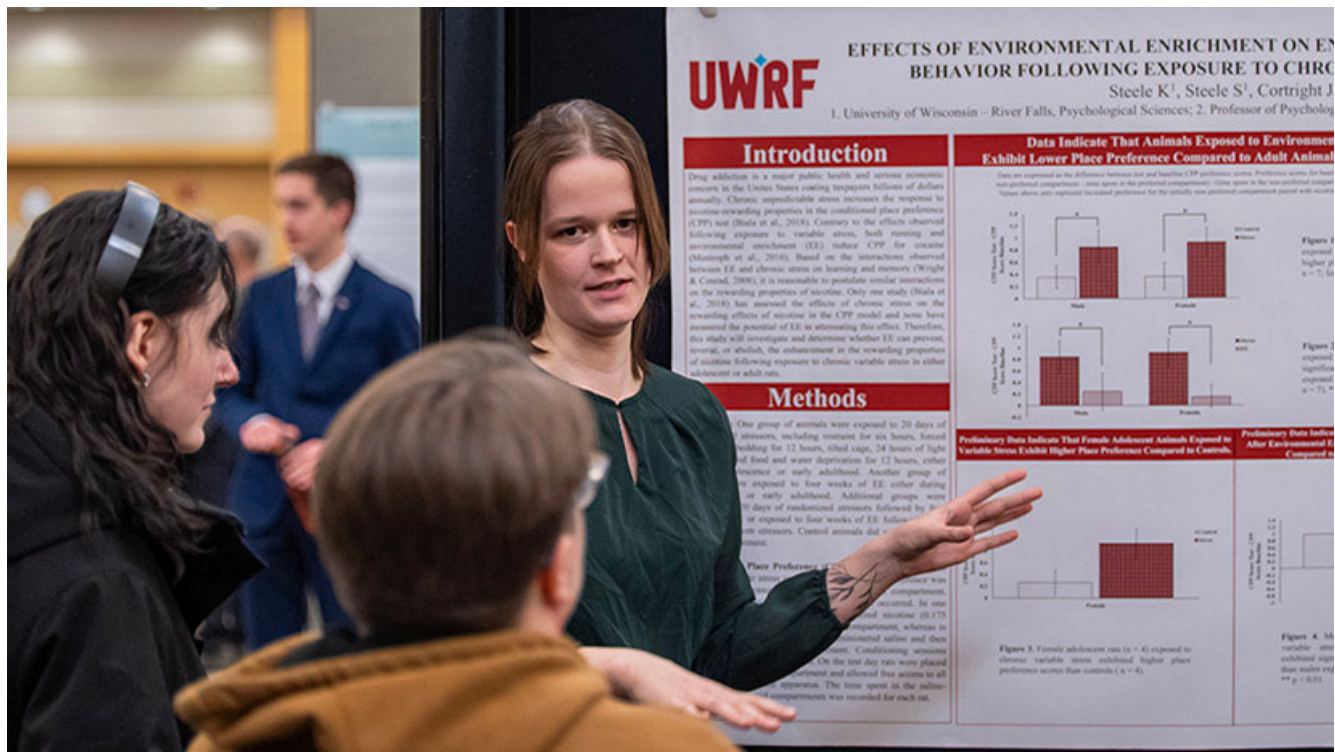
As a leader in Montessori teacher education, UWRF proudly supports both emerging and seasoned Montessori educators with master's level certifications and is home to the nation's first doctoral program in Montessori studies. The Montessori education model, named for Maria Montessori, offers a child-centered approach that emphasizes hands-on learning, independence, and self-directed activity.

The conference will feature breakout sessions covering a range of topics relevant to every stage of Montessori education, including infant/toddler, children's house, lower and upper elementary, early adolescence, as well as administration and parent tracks.

The event promises valuable insights into culturally responsive, inclusive education practices that support holistic child development and foster a more peaceful, understanding world.

Montessori educators, administrators and parents are encouraged to attend, along with public and independent school educators and administrators.

For more information and to register, visit uwrf.edu/ex/montessori/ or contact montessori@uwrf.edu.



Sarah Steele, a junior at UW-River Falls, describes a research project she is part of to onlookers during Tuesday's Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity Fall Gala at the university. A total of 112 students presented 68 projects at the event. UWRF photo

'You can't help but be impressed': UW-River Falls students showcase their academic skills at URSCA Fall Gala

Dec. 4, 2024 - Katrina Steele knows her stuff. Fellow UW-River Falls student and research partner Sarah Steele (not related) does, too.

The pair presented their research project Tuesday at the Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity (URSCA) Fall Gala Tuesday at UWRF. They described how their experiments on trauma and substance abuse in rats relates to humans, and how their research could help lead to better outcomes for people.

"This research is important because it can help people," Sarah Steele said. "That's a big reason why we are motivated to do this work, because we hope it can have a real, positive impact."

Katrina Steele, a senior from Bismarck, N.D., triple majoring in neuroscience, psychology, and biomedical health science, and Sarah Steele, a junior from Hudson double majoring in neuroscience and biomedical health science, said the depth of their research ensures that they know their project thoroughly and can discuss it thoughtfully with others.

They have presented their work at other research events, including in Long Beach, Calif., and Washington, D.C. Their research, combined with presentation experience, has significantly improved their confidence, they said. The duo was among 112 students presenting 68 projects as part of Fall Gala.

“The first time I presented, I was afraid to even talk,” Katrina said with a laugh. “Now I feel really confident talking about our work. I know having that confidence is going to serve me well going forward.”

That sentiment is music to the ears of Molly Gerrish, a teacher education professor and URSCA director. UWRF established the URSCA Office in 2013 to support and promote undergraduate research and creative, high-impact student learning opportunities.

Increased self-confidence is one of the benefits students glean from participating in the many high-quality research opportunities UWRF offers, Gerrish said.

“As these students do their research and grow their skills and knowledge, they begin to see themselves as real scholars,” she said. “One of the most heartening aspects of this is seeing students’ confidence grow.”

The student work on display at the gala is evidence of the quality research opportunities available to UWRF students, Gerrish said. She praised the challenging, high-impact projects students take part in and their ability to work closely with professors who serve as mentors.

“Students here have the opportunity to work on high-level projects with faculty,” Gerrish said. “It is the kind of very involved, in-depth, hands-on learning that often isn’t available to undergraduate students elsewhere.”

Students presenting their research at the Fall Gala said such learning opportunities are among the reasons they chose to attend UWRF. They said conducting quality research as an undergraduate sets them up for success whether they plan to attend graduate school or enter the workforce.

Sophia Symalla is part of a research project that studies the impact of social isolation on mice and how that correlates to human teens’ addiction issues. She said that work has taught her the academic and critical thinking skills to further her career aspirations.

A junior neuroscience and psychology double major from Woodbury, Minn., she hopes to get her doctorate in neuroscience and conduct autism research. Like many UWRF students, Symalla has been part of other research efforts as well during her time at the university.

“I’m so thankful for the opportunity to do so many great research projects with professors here,” she said. “Those experiences have not only greatly improved my knowledge but have set me up for doing the kind of work in the future that I want to do.”

Symalla and other students said their interactions with faculty research mentors is invaluable. The personal, caring approach of UWRF faculty not only increases learning, students said, but makes the research more enjoyable.

“He is not only helpful, but he empowers us to take the lead on our research,” Sarah Steele said of her faculty mentor, James Cortright, an associate professor of psychological sciences. “And when we need to be reined in and go in a different direction, he knows how to help us do that, too.”

Grace Lewis, an assistant professor of animal and food science, said students involved with research are motivated to work and often only need opportunities and guidance to find success. She worked with three students who presented their research at the Fall Gala.

“These students just need the chance to show what they can do,” Lewis said. “You look at the work they are doing, and you can’t help but be impressed.”



Kris Tjornehoj, a longtime music professor at UW-River Falls, leads UW-River Falls musicians during a performance in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building on Oct. 6 as part of the university's homecoming celebration. Tjornehoj, who is active in other regional music endeavors, is retiring after 31 years at the university and 44 teaching music. UWRF photo

Concert to celebrate retirement of longtime music teacher

Kristin Tjornehoj to retire after 44 years of infusing others with a love for music

Dec. 10, 2024 - An upcoming music concert at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls will provide attendees with holiday cheer and also serve as a tribute to longtime music Professor Kristin Tjornehoj, who will retire after 31 years of teaching students at the university.

The UWRF Symphony, conducted by Tjornehoj, and the University Band, led by Gary Bird, will perform a number of Christmas favorites, including "Sleigh Bells" and "Sleigh Ride," during a concert at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 12, in William Abbott Concert Hall in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building, 420 E. Cascade Ave., River Falls. Special guests include the St. Croix Valley Flute Collective, led by Dennis Hartung.

Tickets are \$8/adults, \$5/seniors and \$2/students and are available at the door. A reception following the concert will be held at Junior's Restaurant & Tap House, 414 S. Main St., River Falls.

The concert celebrates Tjornehoj's retirement after 44 years teaching music. In addition to her time at UWRF, she also spent 13 years as a Hudson School District music instructor. Thousands of students have been influenced by and worked with Tjornehoj as she has taught regional, state, and international honors groups, clinics and tours for students and adults.

"I love serving the greater St. Croix Valley with music and creating community opportunities to connect and shine," she said.

Tjornehoj will help lead another holiday-themed concert on Sunday, Dec. 15. The St. Croix Valley Symphony Orchestra concert, "A Christmas Extravaganza," is scheduled for 3 p.m. at Trinity Lutheran Church in Stillwater, Minn. Clark Weyrauch will collaborate with Tjornehoj for the event, which is free and open to the public.

With Tjornehoj's retirement, future performances will occur under the St. Croix Sounds umbrella, using the fiscal agent ArtReach St. Croix. For more information, visit those organization's websites and Facebook pages, or contact Tjornehoj at 715-410-7410 or kristin.tjornehoj@gmail.com.

Tjornehoj has longtime roots in the St. Croix region. She grew up in New Richmond and currently resides in Hudson. She earned her music degrees at Luther College and the University of Minnesota.

Motivated by education, music, and leadership endeavors, Tjornehoj said she creates and embraces opportunities to let others learn, grow, and excel in and out of the classroom. As she retires from teaching, Tjornehoj said she will continue to offer concerts, engage community, provide lectures and podcasts, and create tours for musicians and cultural/food seekers domestically and abroad.

"Quality living involves finding oneself by learning and growing," she said. "I have used the tools of music and education to make the world a better place, one individual at a time."



Cheryl Allen, left, and Aishwarya Sankaranarayanan, students in the Montessori Studies doctorate program at UW-River Falls, discuss their coursework. The doctoral program, among the only degree of its kind in the U.S., was recently approved to begin accepting international students. UWRF file photo.

Montessori doctoral program now open to international students

Program director praises the value of perspectives from elsewhere in the world

Dec. 23, 2024 - The Montessori Studies doctoral program at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls is now open to students from around the world, a move that will grow the program and bring it a more global perspective.

Allowing international students into the program was recently approved by the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), a web-based system used by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to maintain information about international students. Being allowed to accept international students will further enhance the education students receive, Kateri Carver, assistant professor and director of the Montessori Studies doctoral program, said. Prospective students can learn how to apply for the program at uwrf.edu/Montessori-EdD/HowtoApply.cfm.

“These students will bring us new ideas about Montessori pedagogy,” Carver said. “We can really benefit from learning how Montessori is implemented in different countries of the world. This opens new avenues for cross-cultural research and cross-cultural collaboration.”

Including international perspectives makes sense for Montessori, given its international foundation, Carver said. The

Montessori education model is named for its founder, Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori. Montessori Theory is an educational approach that emphasizes individualized instruction and self-paced learning.

“Montessori is such an international pedagogy,” Carver said. “It is not just American education. It is a pedagogy of human flourishing. It is for everybody, everywhere.”

The Doctor of Education (Ed.D) degree in Montessori Studies was approved by the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents in 2021. It is the first doctoral program at UWRF and is among the only degree of its kind nationally. The UWRF program has a strong focus on educational practice as opposed to theory, Carver said.

Thirty-three students are currently enrolled in UWRF’s Montessori doctoral program. Carver said she expects to enroll 12 students annually and several international students have already applied, she said.

The program consists of online coursework during spring and fall semesters. A hybrid model is used during summer months, with students meeting in person to share perspectives and their work. International students will participate in in-person coursework with their peers during summers. The program typically takes 3 ½ to four years to complete.

UWRF also offers a Master of Science in Education degree in Montessori Education.

Gay Ward, a teacher education professor at UWRF from 2001-15 and the founder and original director of the university’s Montessori program, said she “is so pleased” to learn that the university’s Montessori doctoral program can now accept international applicants. Including students from other nations in UWRF’s Montessori doctoral program will add valuable perspectives that will improve learners’ experiences, she said.

“To have international students in the UWRF Montessori doctoral program will broaden the connections, insights and applications that will emerge from the course interactions, research and international mentorship opportunities,” Ward said. “How much more powerful is creative, critical, and culturally responsive thinking when applied to experiences in multiple cultures!”

UWRF’s program is appealing to Montessori educators, she said, in part because it offers a doctoral degree more in line with Montessori philosophy.

“Until this program was founded by UWRF, Montessorians pursuing doctoral degrees did so within a traditional framework,” Ward said. “To actually have an opportunity to pursue their doctoral work in a Montessori pedagogical way is a unique opportunity that the UWRF program offers.”

For more information, contact Carver at kateri.carver@uwrf.edu.



Jacob Range, a first-year student at UW-River Falls, participates in the Go Big or Go Broke® interactive board game at the university on Dec. 4. As part of an effort to promote financial literacy, Royal Credit Union visited the university's School of Business and Economics to familiarize first-year students with their career field and academic success strategies. UWRF photo.

Royal Credit Union partners with School of Business and Economics for interactive financial literacy game

Dec. 12, 2024 - University of Wisconsin-River Falls School of Business and Economics (SBE) students used an interactive board game to learn more about their business-related careers.

Students enrolled in SBE, part of the College of Education, Business and Allied Health (CEBAH), welcomed Royal Credit Union (Royal) to their First-Year Seminar class Dec. 4-5 for a firsthand experience in financial literacy. Through the Go Big or Go Broke® life-sized board game, students gained essential financial education in an engaging and entertaining way.

The First-Year Seminar course is specifically for SBE students in their first year at UWRF. The course helps students explore their strengths, identify success strategies, develop academic plans and investigate different business majors and career paths.

Go Big or Go Broke® is a signature initiative by Royal designed to empower college students with practical financial knowledge. Acting as their own game pieces, participants navigated a giant board filled with real-life financial scenarios, trivia and challenges that tested their decision-making skills. From unexpected detours like the Money Pit and Credit Chaos Corner

portions of the game to questions about budgeting, saving and credit management, students learned valuable lessons applicable to their current and future financial journeys.

The object of the game was simple: earn the most money while expanding financial knowledge. The grand prize winner took home a gift card, while all participants celebrated their achievements with a trip to the swag shop to spend their earnings.

CEBAH Dean Muhammad Chishty emphasized the importance of experiential learning.

“Bringing financial literacy into the classroom in such a dynamic way engages our students and makes complex concepts accessible and memorable,” he said. “We’re grateful for Royal Credit Union’s partnership in preparing our students for lifelong success.”

“At Royal Credit Union, we’re passionate about bringing financial education to life in exciting and innovative ways,” said Deb Paulsen, community financial education coordinator at Royal. “We’re proud to partner with UWRF to help students build essential financial skills they can carry with them throughout their lives.”

The event is part of UWRF’s broader commitment to equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed for personal and professional growth. By collaborating with partners like Royal, the college continues to provide innovative and impactful learning experiences.

For more information about the UWRF School of Business and Economics, visit www.uwrf.edu/academics/school-business-and-economics or call 715-425-3774.

Strong advocates: UW-River Falls educators honored by Universities of Wisconsin

Bao Lee, Michelle Parkinson lauded for their efforts to help students who need support

Dec. 5, 2024 - Two University of Wisconsin-River Falls educators have been recognized by the Universities of Wisconsin for their advocacy on behalf of students in need of support.



Bao Lee, an academic coach in the TRIO Student Support Services office, is one of 12 recipients among Universities of Wisconsin schools to receive the 2024 Outstanding Women of Color in Education Award. The award is given annually to faculty, staff, students or community members to recognize their achievements to advance equity and inclusion for people of color.

Michelle Parkinson, a professor of English Literature, is among 13 to be honored with the 2024 Dr. P.B. Poorman Award for Outstanding Achievement on Behalf of LGBTQ+ People. The award is given annually to LGBTQ+ people or their allies who have created a safer and more inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ people. The award celebrates the memory of Dr. Paula B. Poorman, a highly respected UW-Whitewater faculty member dedicated to improving the lives of LGBTQ+ people.

Recipients of both awards were recognized at a ceremony Wednesday in Madison. Each UW university was invited to select nominees for the awards.

Lee draws on her background as a first-generation college student to help current students overcome barriers. She also serves as secretary of the Wisconsin chapter of TRIO professionals. TRIO refers to federal programs that help low-income students access higher education.

"As a first-generation college graduate herself, she is fulfilled knowing she is helping students from similar backgrounds acquire a college education because she believes that college education opens opportunities for personal and professional development," UWRF Dean of Students Michael Gilmer said of Lee. "She wants her students to know that they do not have to go through college alone."

Parkinson has co-taught women's and gender studies, a class she co-created, and has served as women's and gender studies coordinator. She also teaches a course featuring an emphasis on queer theory and gender studies.

Accolades are nothing new to Parkinson. She was the recipient of the College of Arts and Sciences Excellence in Teaching Award in 2012 and the college's Excellence in Advising Award in 2013.



“She continues to think of her role as a teacher and leader as an ongoing opportunity to create spaces welcoming to individuals of all gender, sexual, and social identities,” Gilmer said of Parkinson.



UW President Jay Rothman said the awards are a recognition of the many outstanding faculty, staff, and students at the state’s public universities.

“Honorees are helping build a better experience for our students, faculty, and staff,” Rothman said.

Headshots: Bao Lee (top), Michelle Parkinson (bottom)



Twenty-one students in the Sales Promotions and Event Planning class at UW-River Falls organized a fundraiser that raised \$3,600 for the River Falls Sunshine Fund and led to clothing donations valued at more than \$7,000. The class is taught by David Bonko, associate professor of marketing communications. UWRF photo.

Students raise \$3,600 for local charity that helps families in need

Gift & Thrift effort teaches marketing skills while also benefiting the community

Dec. 12, 2024 - University of Wisconsin-River Falls marketing communications students recently combined hands-on learning with helping their community, raising \$3,600 for families experiencing financial challenges and garnering clothing donations totaling more than \$7,000.

Twenty-one students in the Sales Promotions and Event Planning class spent the semester planning and designing the fourth annual Gift & Thrift event to raise money for the River Falls Sunshine Fund. The nonprofit, led by River High School students, provides financial assistance to people facing various hardships.

The course is a real-life exercise in using marketing and communication skills to put on an event. It is taught by David Bonko, associate professor of marketing communications and program director of the marketing communications program.

Throughout the semester, Bonko's students organized a clothing donation drive and acquired sponsorships and donations from local businesses. They carried out marketing efforts, including on social media. The effort culminated in a Dec. 5 event on campus at which clothing sales and a silent auction raised money for the nonprofit.

Students had set a \$3,000 fundraising goal. Their hard work and the generosity of community members helped them exceed that number, they said.

“The hard work paid off and exceeding our goal of \$3,000 in donations was truly incredible,” said Alexis Opatz, a senior marketing communications major from St. Paul, Minn. “It was a rewarding experience that combined our personal growth with meaningful community impact.”

In addition to the fundraising total, students also facilitated the collection of 3,284 clothing and household items. Items not sold at the event were donated to multiple nonprofits, including Adoray’s Treasures from the Heart and Second Chances Thrift Store, both located in River Falls, Union Gospel Mission Twin Cities, and Goodwill Industries. The donated items were valued at \$7,324.

Colleen Jahnke, president of the River Falls Sunshine Fund, said she is impressed with the dedication students showed to collecting money and clothing to help others in their community. Since its inception in 2016, the fund has distributed more than \$250,000 to more than 500 families.

“The wonderful donation coming to the Sunshine Fund will continue to help in our assistance to those in need in our community and will allow us to continue our mission,” Jahnke said.

Students said they were unsure what to expect from event, which was held in the University Center on campus. When they arrived, students were greeted with a long line of people waiting to enter. More than 600 people attended the event, nearly double the previous year.

“We didn’t know how many people would show up,” said Ava Lund, a senior from Hugo, Minn., double majoring in marketing communications and communications studies. “Then the doors opened and there was this long line of people. It was heartening to see that so many people cared.”

Students said they faced multiple challenges as they planned the fundraiser. Chief among them was simply collaborating with many different personalities and working styles, they said. Sometimes miscommunication got in the way of effective teamwork.

“Better communication and collaboration across committees might have enhanced our marketing efforts,” Opatz said.

However, overcoming struggles is part of the learning process of Gift & Thrift, Bonko said. Students not only learn the many facets of planning an event and the importance of teamwork, he said, but also how to deal with unforeseen circumstances and adversity.

“As part of this effort, students learn in real time the challenges that crop up and how to overcome them,” Bonko said. “I’m very proud of what this group has accomplished. Hosting the event the week after Thanksgiving break presented a hurdle in terms of generating awareness and interest. However, from the comments made by our guests, this event was a success.”

Students said they feel the same way. In addition to raising money for a good community cause, they said participating in Gift & Thrift taught them marketing and communication skills they will take with them into their careers.

"I learned so much through this hands-on experience," Lund said. "We learned about the importance of clear communication, about working with others, and how organized you have to be to do a good job of putting on an event like this. We not only learned about the event-planning industry, but we have the fulfillment of helping people in need."



Graduates celebrate during the 2024 spring Commencement ceremony at UW-River Falls. On Saturday, Dec. 14, 324 UW-River Falls students graduated during fall Commencement. UWRF file photo

UW-River Falls Commencement speakers praise graduates' ability to persevere

Enduring pandemic-related challenges taught students important life lessons

Dec. 16, 2024 - During Saturday's fall Commencement ceremony at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, Interim Chancellor Mike Martin told the audience that this year's graduates have learned to achieve success despite challenges, a skill that will serve them well in their future.

Graduating students entered college during the coronavirus pandemic and learned to adapt to difficulties and continue learning, Martin said. Persevering through challenges is a vital skill in a world that is "continually changing with ever-emerging challenges and opportunities," he said.

"While the graduates celebrated today have completed a challenging educational experience, they are truly positioned to enter the next phase of their lives," he told students. "Most importantly, you have achieved the ability to continually learn. And this is the most powerful outcome of your time at UWRF."

During the ceremony, held at Page Arena at the Falcon Center, 324 students received degrees; 286 earned bachelor's degrees, 34 earned master's degrees and four their associate degrees.

Martin urged graduates to build on their college experience to seek new opportunities and to look to serve as community leaders. Striving to be lifelong learners will lead to not only greater success but a satisfying life, he said.

“Exercising your curiosity is fundamental to being a successful lifelong learner,” he said. “So never cease to be curious.”

David Bonko, associate professor of marketing communications, the recipient of this year’s Distinguished Teaching Award, credited graduates for persevering to earn their degrees despite starting their college careers amid myriad difficulties posed by the pandemic.

Graduates worked diligently to succeed despite those hurdles, he said, and displayed resilience along the way.

“Resilience is much more than enduring hardships,” Bonko said. “It’s the art of adapting, growing and thriving despite life’s challenges. You didn’t just survive or endure. You adapted, innovated and grew at a level that many don’t realize.”

Having found academic success amid such conditions will prove invaluable in dealing with future life challenges, Bonko told graduates.

“As you enter your career or continue your education, you can bet you will face many challenges,” he said. “But rest assured you are much stronger than you think, more creative than you realize and capable of accomplishing more things than you can imagine. The last four years serve as living and undeniable proof of this fact.”



Anthony Varghese, chair of the Computer, Information and Data Sciences Department at UW-River Falls, teaches a computer science class at the university. Varghese will instruct high school computer science teachers how to conduct research on that topic as part of a three-year program in conjunction with UW-Eau Claire and UW-Stout. The partnership is made possible by a \$550,786 National Science Foundation grant. UWRF file photo

UW-River Falls, others partner to receive National Science Foundation grant

Three-year, \$550,786 grant will be used to bolster computer science education, boost region's economy

Dec. 23, 2024 - High school students in western Wisconsin and eastern Minnesota will learn the latest advancements in computer science, thanks to a \$550,786 National Science Foundation grant received by the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and two partner universities.

UWRF partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and the University of Wisconsin-Stout to successfully qualify for grant funding. The grant dollars will enable the three universities to train high school teachers in the St. Croix Valley region to conduct research in computer science and develop materials to teach the subject, boosting the region's future economy in the process.

The effort will build on existing partnerships between area high schools and the three universities to provide students with research-based practices in their computer science curriculum. The work is designed "to enhance the lives of the local

population,” said Merry Mcclaird, director of grants and research at UWRF.

“The objective of this project is to provide transformative opportunities to 30 in-service teachers delivering computer science education to high school students in this region by forming a network of teachers, students and college campuses,” Mcclaird said.

Grant funding will allow the consortium to provide training to high school teachers for the next three summers. Teachers will spend four weeks at either UWRF or UW-Eau Claire to learn computer science research from faculty at the schools. They will then spend three weeks at UW-Stout to develop curriculum models and conduct educational research.

The project aims to expand the number of qualified computer science teachers in western Wisconsin and eastern Minnesota. It will also expand computer science research in those communities by providing high school students with improved data analysis skills. When those students get jobs in the region, they will add to the region’s computer science workforce.

“This project will bring computer science research to the communities in this region, providing high school students with enhanced data analysis skills going to work in local communities,” Mcclaird said. “Each cohort of teachers who transfer their research experience back to their schools and their communities will yield hundreds of high school students capable of thinking more deeply about the relevance of computer science in their local community.”

The National Science Foundation awards grants worldwide to investigators working in the sciences. UWRF and its partners were competing with universities across the U.S. – most of them major research institutions – to obtain the computer science education grant.

“The fact that we received the grant from the National Science Foundation is significant since it can burnish UWRF’s reputation locally and nationally,” said Anthony Varghese, chair of the Computer, Information and Data Sciences Department at UWRF. “The teachers who will participate can add this to their list of accomplishments as well.”

Varghese will train educators in computer science research at UWRF and Rahul Gomes, who teaches computer science at UW-Eau Claire, will do the same at UWEC. Katrina Rothrock, assistant professor of mathematics at UWEC, and Abhimanyu Ghosh, an assistant professor in engineering and technology at UW-Stout, will lead the three-week session at Stout where teachers will learn how to conduct educational research and implement it into their curriculum.

Provost Wes Chapin praised the collaboration and views it as “a great opportunity” for UWRF to work with other universities and high schools, building community connections in the process.

“The disciplinary field of computer science is growing and provides critical education and skills that will help prepare high school students for a future that is increasingly being defined by technology,” he said. “It will also help prepare them to be successful if they continue their education beyond high school or as they serve the people of this region as part of the workforce.”