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Zasada earns Academic Staff Award of Excellence

PLATTEVILLE, Wis – Michelle Zasada, student services manager of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville Distance Learning Center, was selected to receive the 2017 UW-Platteville Academic Staff Award for Excellence. She will be honored with the other UW-Platteville award winners Thursday, Aug. 31 at the annual all-campus convocation in Velzy Commons in Ullsvik Hall.

“I was honored and humbled to be nominated for the Academic Staff Award for Excellence,” Zasada said. “My journey here at UW-Platteville has been a long and varied one that has allowed me to recognize and work within a passion of mine, lifelong learning.”

Zasada, who has held the position of student services manager for seven years, is far from an unfamiliar face on campus. After graduating from UW-Platteville, she worked for a number of years outside higher education. She returned to campus in 1997 where she served as housing assistant office coordinator from 1997-99 until joining the Athletics Department as compliance and internal operations coordinator. When she joined the Distance Learning Center in 2007, Zasada was quick to notice some changes between working with students in-person vs. on-line.

“It is so different,” Zasada said. “It was a huge transition from being in a vibrant hub in the fieldhouse where I worked face to face with students to seeing no one in my office in the basement of the library as the students I was working with were located around the world and I communicated with them via email or phone.”

However, it didn't take long for Zasada to adjust to a career working with distance

learning students.

“It’s a rewarding population to work with,” she said. “They’re typically older students who are working adults, and they may have families. They are really motivated and committed to their education and want to finish a degree that they may have started many years ago. It’s really nice when we invite them to come to graduation, and so many do come. We’ve had students come as far away as Alaska. This is usually their first time on campus, and it is fun to see them connect fact-to-face with the advisors, instructors and program coordinators they have worked with during their education. It’s exciting to hear them talk about how their degree has led to a promotion or different job.”

As student service manager, Zasada is responsible for the oversight of the Student Services team and managing many of the daily operations of the area, a responsibility that many believe she exceeds at.

“Michelle is exceptional at managing staff—empowering them and instilling confidence to be problem solvers and work independently, yet being approachable and supportive when needed,” Wendy Pothour-Miller, senior outreach specialist of the Distance Learning Center, said in her nomination letter. “Michelle’s professional demeanor and strong interpersonal skills serve her well for this position.”

These traits, along with many more, are what helped Zasada be chosen as the recipient of the Academic Staff Award for Excellence. The annual award recognizes an instructional or non-instructional academic staff member who has provided essential services to the university while demonstrating excellence of performance, personal interaction, initiative and creativity, and outstanding achievement. Nominations may come from university staff, limited term employees, academic staff, administrators, faculty and students.

“I wasn’t expecting this award, but it’s nice to be appreciated and to have someone say, ‘You’re doing a good job,’” Zasada said. “It’s also a testament to

my team, the Distance Learning Center and the entire campus. I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for all the colleagues and supervisors who believed **in me and helped shape the person I am today.**"

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