

Former UW-River Falls Montessori program director honored with innovation award

December 22, 2016—University of Wisconsin-River Falls Professor Emerita and former Montessori Program Director Gay Ward was honored with the Dennis Schapiro Award for Innovation in Montessori Teacher Education earlier this month. The award, presented by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) is given annually to a member of the Montessori Teacher Education community that has brought about significant change. Ward was recognized for her multitude of contributions to Montessori education throughout Wisconsin, the United States, and internationally.

In 2012, Ward spearheaded efforts to create a Montessori Teacher Education Program at UW-River Falls. As the visionary behind the program, she designed the first blended learning format program approved by the American Montessori Society (AMS). Her tireless efforts secured \$43,000 worth of Strategic Initiative Funding from UW-River Falls. The funds were the cornerstone of a vision that expanded from an original plan for an EC and E-1 (ages 2.5 -9 years) program to also include E2 and Sec 1-2 (ages 9-18).

As part of the formation of the UWRF program, over the course of a year, Ward wrote and oversaw the creation of over 40 Montessori graduate courses. In addition to blueprinting the coursework, Ward envisioned an innovative infant toddler course that embraced both Montessori and traditional programs. She was instrumental in identifying Montessori infant toddler educators who assisted in revamping and teaching the course.

Prior to the founding of the Montessori program at UWRF, Ward incorporated hands-on learning during her time as an instructor in the UW-River Falls elementary teacher education program. She played an instrumental role in introducing pre-service teachers to Montessori education by incorporating visits to Montessori schools into her curriculum. Additionally, she assisted in the planning and launching of a Montessori charter school in River Falls (River Falls Public Montessori Elementary) and served on the board of Heartland Montessori, an AMI Montessori private school in River Falls.

Ward's commitment to Montessori education, both through her time teaching and founding the UWRF Montessori Teacher Education Program reinforces the distinctive academic excellence found throughout UWRF's programs. Thanks to her tireless efforts, UWRF's Graduate Montessori Teacher Education Program now offers Montessori Credentials for three separate age levels. The program is MACTE accredited and AMS affiliated for all levels (EC, E1, and E1-2) through 2020. The UWRF program is one of only two MACTE accredited programs in Wisconsin.

In addition to her work in River Falls, Ward co-chairs the AMS Research committee and played an instrumental role in the launch of the Montessori Research Journal. She was recently elected to the Board of Directors of the Wisconsin Montessori Association and assisted in the organization of Wisconsin's first Montessori administrator's conference in September. Ward also co-authored a book, "Reading Development: A Handbook of Assessment and Instruction," that is widely used in MACTE Montessori EC and elementary reading and language arts courses.

The Dennis Schapiro Award for Innovation in Montessori Teacher Education is presented in honor of Dennis Schapiro, an innovator in the Montessori world. Recipients of the award showcase numerous accomplishments and characteristics, including the development of an innovative approach to Montessori Teacher Education and the address of specific need in Montessori Teacher Education.

For more information, email graduateadmissions@uwrf.edu or visit <https://www.uwrf.edu/Academics/GraduatePrograms/Montessori.cfm>.

###

Photo: University of Wisconsin-River Falls Professor Emerita and former Montessori Program Director Gay Ward was honored with the Dennis Schapiro Award for Innovation in Montessori Teacher Education earlier this month. She was recognized for her multitude of contributions to Montessori education throughout Wisconsin, the United States, and internationally.