

2012 UW-La Crosse Academic Staff Excellence Award

Assistant to the Dean loves problem-solving for students

More than an adviser

Carla Burkhardt remembers the help she received from the assistant to the dean when she transferred to UW-La Crosse in the mid-'80s. She never thought she would one day advise students in a similar role.

"When I met with Lois Wirkus as a transfer student, I never dreamed I'd be working alongside of her 10 years later," says Burkhardt.

But that's what she's been doing since her graduate assistantship in the Records and Registration Office in 1990-91. Burkhardt has served as an academic adviser in the College of Education; College of Arts, Letters and Sciences; Alliance for Human Development Programs; and College of Liberal Studies. Since 1998 she's been academic assistant to the dean in the College of Science and Health.

Most importantly, she's been helping students meander through the challenges of completing degree requirements.

"I'm proud of how we try to help students get to the bottom of a problem and are honest with them about challenges they may be facing," she says.

Her "to-do" list with students includes:

- informing prospective students about UW-L programs
- explaining requirements and recommending coursework
- referring to appropriate faculty and staff

- enforcing academic policies
- processing students' graduation. ("That's my favorite," she notes.)

Each task includes behind-the-scenes collaboration, committee work, articulations and agreements, evaluations, requirements, and paperwork, says Burkhardt.

"All these tasks ooze with students' lives, their stories, their dreams, their struggles and their successes," she explains. "When I'm able to help them with a problem they don't think can be solved, it's all worth it."

Burkhardt has seen technological advances help ease advising, but, she says, a human touch is still needed.

"It may list the classes they still need, but it doesn't tell them the order to take the classes so it's the most beneficial to them," she notes.

Burkhardt says working with great

colleagues over the years has made work enjoyable. She's seen the workload and staff grow as the College of Science and Health's enrollment has increased. But, she says problem-solving with students and helping them through advising hurdles is the highlight.

"I'm optimistic and somewhat of a Pollyanna," she says. "I believe good things are going to happen."

— Brad Quarberg, University Communications



The Carla Burkhardt file

- **Worked on campus since 1990. Academic Assistant to the Dean in the College of Science and Allied Health since 1998.**
- **Campus involvement: Academic Staff Council; Golden Key International Honour Society; Foundation Scholarship Committee; Centennial Capital Campaign Committee; numerous search and screen committees; more.**
- **Community involvement: church council and choir; UW-L Choral Union; poll inspector.**
- **Two degrees from UW-L — bachelor's in elementary education, 1986; master's in college student personnel, 1993.**