

Problem solver

Manter is the answer to students' math queries

When things aren't adding up, some UW-L students turn to Nelda Manter.

For 25 years, Manter has helped countless students get through many kinds of mathematics problems. Arithmetic, algebra, trigonometry, calculus, probability, statistics, math logic. They're all perplexing to students trying to get through their math classes. And, some were a problem for Manter, too, when she started tutoring students in 1978.

After teaching math for Columbus, Ind., Community Schools, Manter took time off from teaching to start a family. She then owned and taught at a pre-school in West Salem, Wis. After 11 years, she quit teaching 4-year-olds and looked for a different job. She answered an ad for a tutor through a new program at UW-L.

Despite being away from teaching math for 11 years, Manter applied and was hired. That meant back-to-the-books for her, too, because she hadn't worked with calculus and trigonometry for nearly 20 years. Also, she was studying statistics for the first time. "I worked on problems, took the books home and sat up until midnight reviewing and learning math problems," she recalls.

That's just one of the reasons Manter works so well tutoring students. With changes in textbooks, new calculators and computer software, Manter knows what it's like to be confused and challenged with math.

Manter sets no appointments. Still, the 10 chairs around the tables in her Wilder Hall Office are often full, with more students at the door. She helps students in the order they arrive, often getting little time for lunch and staying late until a student understands a concept.

While some would find the demanding



Nelda Manter, center, helps students at Student Support Services. Manter is one of the 2002 Academic Staff Excellence Award recipients.

The Nelda Manter file

- Holds a bachelor's degree from Elmhurst (Ill.) College; master's from Western Washington State College, Bellingham, Wash.
- Mathematics teacher, Columbus (Ind.) Community Schools, 1958-1963
- Owner, teacher, Lakeview Pre-School, West Salem, Wis., 1967-1978.
- Math specialist, UW-L Student Support Services, 1978-present; part-time mathematics instructor, UW-L Mathematics Department, 1979-1982.

schedule taxing, Manter relishes in it. "I like working math problems all day long," she says. "I never get tired of math."

Over the years, Manter has taught both credit courses for the mathematics department, and non-credit courses for Student Support Services. In 1982, she developed a non-credit, pre-statistics course to help students prepare for the grueling class. She still teaches the popular one-hour class that runs throughout the semester.

The Student Support Services program at

UW-L, which provides advising and math and language arts tutoring, is limited to serving 375 students. Students qualify by being a first generation college student, having a low income, or a physical or learning disability.

Manter finds the most joy in her nine-month, academic year position by seeing students succeed. "I find great satisfaction in helping students understand what they need to learn and then seeing them do well on their tests," she explains. "It's especially exciting to see them succeed when they think they can't."

Manter humbly accepts the Academic Staff Excellence Award, pointing out that many of her colleagues could qualify for it, too.

Manter's colleagues agree that "her generosity, thoughtfulness and hard work" brighten the office on a regular basis. As the person in charge of the office's "Sunshine Fund," she organizes birthday celebrations, decorates staff members' doors on their birthdays and has established a "Birthday Box" for student workers, allowing them to pick a present on their special day.

Manter lives in West Salem with her husband, Paul, a retired UW-L English professor. They have four grown children. Three are graduates of UW-L; the other graduated from UW-Madison. They also have one granddaughter.

Nelda Manter and Lori Petersen will be honored at the Academic Staff Annual Meeting, 4 p.m., Tuesday, Sept. 24 in the Ward Room, Cartwright Center.