

McFadden wins award for exemplary service to the elderly

by Vanessa Virbitsky - Thursday, April 17, 2008

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/735/mcfadden-wins-award-for-exemplary-service-to-the-elderly/>

Susan McFadden, a University of Wisconsin Oshkosh psychology professor, is keeping it “old school” — her scholarly research focuses on the spirituality and development of senior citizens.

Recognized for her exemplary service to the spiritual well-being of older people, McFadden was presented the 2008 Spirituality and Aging Award from the National Interface Coalition on Aging at the annual Aging in America Conference March 26-30 in Washington D.C.

“I’ve been doing this type of research for a long time,” McFadden said of her research of the elderly, which began in the 1970s.

At the conference, which she has attended since the mid-1980s, McFadden listened to keynote speakers Maya Angelou, EJ Dionne and Gail Sheey. She also had the opportunity to make a conference presentation “The Story of Hope: Meaning, Growing and Storytelling” with her close friend and former UW Oshkosh professor Anne Basting.

“Since Dr. Basting is a good friend of mine, we collaborated our speeches around the importance of friendship,” McFadden said. “I think it was quite effective.”

In addition to presenting at national conferences, collaborating with peers and conducting research, McFadden has taught introductory to advanced psychology classes at UW Oshkosh since 1985.

McFadden currently is on a year-long sabbatical involving research on people who have been diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment of early-stage dementia.

“This sabbatical has been wonderful,” McFadden said. “I had a one-semester sabbatical in the fall of 1995, but this is the first full year I’ve devoted to intense research.”

By interviewing people locally in northeastern Wisconsin, McFadden has learned that patients diagnosed with early dementia do not know how to react to their diagnosis.

“These people are struggling with memory challenges but still live actively in the community,” McFadden said. “I’m interested in how they remain in contact with the community organizations and, particularly, their religious congregations.”

Religion and spirituality have been present in McFadden’s research since she obtained her doctoral degree in 1984 from Drew University in New Jersey.