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News Bureau • Schofield Hall 201 • Eau Claire, WI 54702

phone: 715-836-4741

fax: 715-836-2900

Web: [www.uwec.edu](http://www.uwec.edu)

e-mail: [newsbur@uwec.edu](mailto:newsbur@uwec.edu)

Caitlin Lee to receive Outstanding Woman of Color in Education Award

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EAU CLAIRE — Caitlin Lee, an equal employment opportunity specialist in the Affirmative Action office at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, will receive a UW System Outstanding Woman of Color in Education Award April 17 in Whitewater.

"This recognition means a great deal to me and my family," said Lee. "I come from a culture where most, if not all, women prior to coming to the United States had never set foot inside an elementary school, let alone an institution of higher education."

Lee, who was born in Thailand and spent her first four years in a refugee camp with her family, said she will accept her award "in honor of the parents who raised me and brought me to this country in the hopes of a better and brighter future."

As a UW-Eau Claire student, Lee was an early advocate for diversity and inclusiveness; did research focused on gender, culture, and diversity; and was a part-time employee in the Affirmative Action office. She was a McNair Scholar and received several leadership awards, including the Outstanding Senior Award and the Dagny Midelfort Foreign Language Award. Lee's group poster presentation about the Hmong journey from Laos to Eau Claire for Student Research Day received honorable mention. She graduated in 2003 with a bachelor's degree in political science.

As a full-time equal employment opportunity specialist Lee is regarded as an expert on the Affirmative Action Plan. She trains other UW System employees, is active in the university's Dismantling Racism project and makes time to take her message to the community.

"I acknowledge that there are hundreds of years of discrimination that can't be undone in a few decades, but by actively advocating for conscious awareness of personal biases, I help to ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute," she said.

Lee serves as president of the board of directors for the Eau Claire Hmong Mutual Assistance Association Inc. — notably the first woman to do so out of the 14 statewide HMAA

boards in Wisconsin. She has brought change, new vision, prominence and stability to the organization.

She also mentors her nine younger siblings and has spent considerable time with the Upward Bound Program from which she graduated, working as a tutor and summer instructor for Hmong high school students.

"Culture is prioritized by people, and if we want something changed we must become that change," said Lee. "Every day I wake up and know that the work I do in the Affirmative Action office allows me to be the greatest advocate on campus for equity, diversity and inclusivity."

The UW System Outstanding Women of Color in Education Awards were initiated in 1994 to acknowledge the ties and shared concerns among administrators, faculty, staff and students within women's studies and ethnic studies, and to uphold a continuing commitment to Plan 2008: Education Quality through Racial and Ethnic Diversity.

The awards event is co-sponsored by the UW System Women's Studies Consortium and the UW System Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

For more information, contact Caitlin Lee at 715-836-2387 or leemai@uwec.edu.

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