



## 2017 PRESIDENTIAL TEACHING AWARD NOMINEE

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I have always enjoyed teaching. In many ways, however, UIW in particular has opened my eyes and sharpened my understanding of teaching both inside and outside of the classroom. When we led a student group on a study trip to Turkey, Sr. Martha Ann Kirk told me a story about the mother eagle, who takes her chick on her back and then in mid-air lets go so that the little chick learns to fly on her own. Through my interactions with students, my work in Alpha, and in collaboration with my colleagues in the Writing Academy, I have grown from being an enabler to empowering my students.

It is my goal to help students find their wings, by creating a safe space, where they are allowed to take risks, where they extend themselves academically or intellectually to spaces that are new to them, and learn to trust their own abilities and capabilities. We learn best by doing. So, in my classes, instead of answering quizzes, students write structured responses to the reading every day, that allow them to develop their voices, practice important skills like integrating and citing sources, provide close reading, and focusing on one central idea only. This is not a new idea, and many teachers use this method, but I mention it here, because it has enriched my experience as a teacher. I recognize how many of them make excellent observations, how they engage with the text in ways I had not guessed based on their participation in class only, and their responses rekindle my own literary and professional passion for the literature we read.

I see this difference in particular in shifting my priorities from content-driven materials, to teach them how to be successful in academy and in their professions. Teaching does not start and end with a class period, but it extends into students' personal and professional choices. In my work with Alpha, I have sought to make more transparent several process and expectations that will lead to academic success. Helping first generation students understand that, yes, they do belong in the university, is often more crucial to their success than any specific content knowledge they will learn. Once they believe in themselves, understand why they need to prioritize their time for studying over their work hours at HEB, and lose their fear of asking for help, they are equipped to grapple with any specialized content. I have learned that the social interactions outside of class often do more good than several academic workshops. Taking them to the museum or to a play as a class, helps the students to bond with each other, to realize that their teachers find it worthwhile to spend time with them, and they will remember that experience long after they have received their grades for the class.

I have had the privilege of working with dedicated colleagues all over the university in Alpha and in the Writing Academy. These collaborations have helped me to see how confusing the student experience must be at times, and how much more we can do as teachers to help our students be successful in our classes, at the university, and in their professions. Just this morning, I faced the decision in the American Literature Survey, whether I should stick to my schedule and discuss both Hemingway and Faulkner, or move one of these two seminal American writers to carve out some time for addressing the students' position papers, which are due in two days. I spent the time on the papers and don't regret it. As a class

we were able to clarify expectations, answer particular questions students had, and sharpen individual arguments. We can discuss Faulkner another time.

I don't mean to suggest that we should not cover any content in our classes, but often the content becomes irrelevant, because the students struggle with many other issues before they even get involved with the material. Discussing Faulkner's short story this morning was not as important as thinking critically about how they are developing their own arguments for the next graded assignment, which they can develop into their term papers. In general, I do not have all the answers they seek, but I can facilitate connections and mentor them, whether on the small scale of completing an assignment successfully, pointing out options and opportunities available to them professionally and personally, or encouraging them and offering my ear and shoulder in a time of crisis.

I perceive it as a privilege to meet and interact meaningfully with each of our students, who bring their own unique backgrounds, ideas, and motivations. Our interactions shape our mutual understanding of the world and test the ideas and convictions we hold. I don't want to be remembered as the nice teacher, but the person who challenged and encouraged them, where some questions from the course still resonate with them years later and where they achieved something they had not thought possible before.

### **PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

In my scholarship I am most proud of my two recent book projects. The first, *Business and Economics Readings for ESL Students* (Ulke Press, 2017) which I co-wrote with Dr. Ensar Agirman, who earned his M.B.A. at UIW in 2012, and who is now assistant professor at Ataturk University in his native Erzurum, Turkey. I am proud of this work, because no similar reader exists that allows English language learners to practice and learn English while they read in their subject matter.

My second book is a literary analysis and argument, entitled *A Century of Encounters: Writing the Other in Arab North Africa*. It is currently under review by Syracuse University Press and theorizes constructive and transformative encounters in literature between Arabs, Europeans, and Americans in Arab North Africa throughout the twentieth century.

At the university I am most proud of my role in Alpha: First Generation Student Success and in the QEP Writing Academy. Both have given me the opportunity to work with colleagues from across the university, learn about their teaching and programs, and to facilitate, support, and champion their efforts. Two scholarly presentations came out of the Writing Academy so far: one well-attended presentation at the 2016 annual SACSCOC meeting with Dr. Craig McCarron and Dr. Susan Hall, and one conference presentation at the 2016 College teachers of English Conference with Dr. Hall and Dr. Tisha Harding, for which we won the Randall Popkin Award for Rhetoric.

Thirdly, I would like to mention the quality of work that some of my students have produced and shared with wider audiences. While I can't take credit for their genius, I have tried to create assignments that challenge students in more creative ways, and always encourage them to view their work as viable outside of the class. Ivonne Ayala, Leah Gomez, Elisabeth Hand, Robert Cavazos, Stephanie Jablon, Janelle Harwell, and Manny Doria presented papers and creative works at conferences and symposia, which they wrote for one of my classes. Most of the participants from the first year of the writing Academy also presented their projects locally and at conferences.