

Exceptional Faculty Award spotlight: The voice of encouragement



English instructor Matthew Gallaher.

Matthew Gallaher's English Composition is winding down for the day. "If you have any last-minute questions, I'll stick around," the instructor tells his students, who are broken up into groups to "workshop" their papers with their classmates.

Gallaher sits down near one slump-shouldered student. "How are you doing?" he asks the student. "Do you have questions?"

"No," sighs the student. "I just wish I had more time."

"You *do* have time," Gallaher responds with a smile. He points to the student's paper. "This is only a first draft. You're

still going to do a second draft, and then revise it again before handing it in. Don't give up on this!"

Imagine every possible permutation of the word "encourage," and it shows up in students' nominations of Gallaher for the 2014-2015 Exceptional Faculty Award, along with words like "fun," "sincere," and "enthusiasm."



"The largest impact that Matthew has had on his students, and on me personally, is his ability to make students feel important, and that their individual success is valuable," reads one. "He goes above and beyond to help others, and is encouraging

to his students to continue to develop and share their skills."

Gallaher's enthusiasm and support led him to be recruited as advisor for Alpha Sigma Phi, the Clark College chapter of the international honor society Phi Theta Kappa that blends academic achievement with public service. After two years in that position, Gallaher is stepping down to focus on teaching, but he says he enjoyed mentoring students as they developed new ways to help their community, including annual food drives and a campaign to reduce and reuse electronic waste.

"I was in Boy Scouts as a kid and an Eagle Scout, and it kind of reminded me of that," says Gallaher, who earned Phi Theta Kappa's Paragon Award for New Advisors in 2013.

Much of Gallaher's work at Clark contains echoes of his early years. "My whole family got their associate degrees," he says. "My parents both came from working class families and could never have afforded college without community college. I went to community college as a high school student, St. Petersburg College in South Florida."

Gallagher, who earned his bachelor's degree from University of South Florida and his master's in English from Portland State University, says he appreciates the diversity of students he encounters teaching at a community college. "You never know what kind of students you're going to have," he says. "There are vets from the last two conflicts, and there are students who have only been in this country a few months. There are older students and students who are still in high school. You get all these people together, and they don't agree almost ever, and it's kind of great to hear them get riled up as they hear opinions and viewpoints they've never been exposed to before."

Gallagher says he was honored to discover students had nominated him for the award, especially because he is an adjunct instructor, teaching part-time at Clark and part-time at Portland Community College. "It was surprising and humbling," he says. "Being an adjunct can be lonely. You don't quite feel part of the community. Phi Theta Kappa really helped me feel more a part of Clark. And now this is just another way of saying, 'Hey, you love Clark—and Clark loves you, too.' That feels good."

Learn about other recipients of the 2014-2015 Exceptional Faculty Awards.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley