

# Honoring Three Women ... and Three Decades



Three outstanding women working in different fields, but with a similar commitment to improving the lives of others in Southwest Washington, are the winners of the 2015 Iris Awards, honoring women of achievement in Southwest Washington.

The awards will be presented to Lisa Schauer, Senior Vice President for Business Development at Mackay Sposito; Lori Pulliam, Director of Transition at the Washington State School for the Blind; and Victoria Bradford, owner of Comfort Interiors and a member of the Evergreen Public Schools Board of Directors.

Schauer, Pulliam, and Bradford will be honored on March 5, 2015 in Clark College's Gaiser Student Center. Following a 5 p.m. reception, the awards ceremony will begin at 6 p.m.

Tickets are on sale through the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce at [www.vancouverusa.com](http://www.vancouverusa.com). The cost is \$35 per person; a table sponsorship, which includes six tickets, can be purchased for \$250. Seating is limited.

Clark College is located at 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver. Driving directions and parking maps are available at [www.clark.edu/maps](http://www.clark.edu/maps). Anyone needing accommodation due to a disability in order to fully participate in this event should contact Clark College's Disability Support Services Office at (360) 992-2314 or (VP), or visit Penguin Union Building room 013, by February 27.

The Iris Awards are a continuation of a tradition of honoring women in Southwest Washington that began in 1985 with a photography exhibit at Clark College. Over the years, the annual event has developed into an official awards ceremony, with a nomination process open to all members of the local community.

The Iris Awards are supported by Clark College, the Clark College Foundation, Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce and the *Vancouver Business Journal*, which publishes the “Women in Business” directory, the only Portland/Vancouver metro area directory of businesses that are owned, directed or managed by women. The Iris Award winners will be featured in the 2015 “Women in Business” directory.

### **The 2015 Iris Award Recipients**

#### **Lisa Schauer**



Lisa Schauer, *standing*, goes over spreadsheets at MacKay Sposito.

Lisa Schauer is a Senior Vice President for Business Development at MacKay Sposito. She was the first female partner in the regional engineering consulting firm. As a member of the firm’s Board of Directors and Executive Committee, she is currently responsible for strategically positioning the firm’s business development and marketing

efforts. Schauer is well known throughout MacKay Sposito and in the industry for her commitment to people and mentoring, including launching the company's Veteran's Council, in 2013 to recognize and support veterans.

Schauer is equally well known through her involvement in the community. She is on the Chair of the Board of Directors for the Children's Center and was a Founding Board Director and is currently the Chair of H-RoC Political Action Committee, a non-partisan group formed to advance women leaders in Southwest Washington. She has served on many other boards and leadership positions.

### **Lori Pulliam**



Lori Pullman working with a member of the LIFT program.

Lori Pulliam has been teaching at the Washington State School for the Blind for 32 years, and currently manages the residential department which provides residential services and education to our middle and high school students, and the LIFTT program, which teaches young adults with visual impairment skills of independent living. Throughout these 32 years she has taught students with deaf-blindness, worked with students from WSSB who were taking classes in the local public schools, taught career education and worked with students in community based work experience placements.

Lori has helped develop programs to improve employment

prospects for blind students. She was part of a team that developed the Youth Employment Solutions (YES), a summer career education and work experience program for students with visual impairment. She has been a long time staff member for a summer course for public school educators. Lori has served on boards and commissions in the state. Currently she is serving on the Disability Transition Task Force. Locally she is a member of the Fort Vancouver Lions Club and has given her time to coaching soccer and participating in efforts like the Walk and Knock Food Drive.

### **Victoria Bradford**



Victoria in her interior design shop, Comfort Interiors.

Victoria Bradford is the owner of Comfort Interiors. She bought the interior design business in 2000, and under Bradford's ownership, the company has won awards in both the Vancouver Parade of Homes and the Portland Street of Dreams. She is also one of the founders of Pomeroy Equitable Solutions, a company created to give businesses the opportunity to partner with schools to fund needed programs.

Beyond her full-time duties as a business owner, Bradford has served on the Evergreen Public Schools Board of Directors for the past 15 years. Bradford has served four times as Board President and Vice President, as well as the legislative

representative and federal liaison for both the EPS District and the Washington State School Directors Association. The Evergreen Public School District is the fourth-largest school district in the state, and the third-largest employer in Clark County, with more than 27,000 students and an annual budget of over \$240 million. She has been a leader during highs and lows in the district, from the budget cuts of the late 2000s to the opening or remodeling of 15 schools. A signature achievement was her instrumental role in researching and establishing Henrietta Lacks (HeLa) High, a bioscience and healthcare high school, in the district. Bradford is also a founder of the Quality Schools Coalition of SW Washington.

Bradford is a member of the Vancouver Downtown Association. She is on the Development Committee at The Fort Vancouver National Trust and has parlayed her love of ballroom dancing into best dance honors at the Trust's 2012 Dancing with the Local Stars competition.

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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## **Presidential Coins**



Engineering professor Izad Khormaei receiving a Presidential Coin at the State of the College Address.

In 2007, Clark College President Bob Knight introduced a new honor at Clark College: the presidential coin.

The coin is given to faculty and staff members who provide exemplary service to Clark students, the college and the community. The honorees are decided by the president and are kept secret until the names are announced—generally on Opening Day in the fall or during the annual State of the College address.

Five Clark College employees received Presidential Coins during his 2015 State of the College Address on January 15. They were:



Carolyn Johnson

## **Carolyn Johnson**

Carolyn Johnson has worked at Clark College in various capacities for 10 years, the past six of them in Career Services, where she currently holds the position of Employment Specialist & Co-op Coordinator. Her main focus and interests include assisting students with their job search and doing resume critiques. "I have seen her work tirelessly to help students start from a blank page, get the words on paper, develop a thoughtful summary statement, and assist with the smallest details of formatting," President Knight said in presenting her with the coin. "She does this with patience and care for the student."

Knight also cited Johnson's work with international students, helping them to understand American employment practices and job-search strategies.

## **Izad Khormae**

Professor Izad Khormae has taught Computer Science and Engineering at Clark College since 2002. He also has teaching experience at Oregon Institute of Technology, Washington State University, and Iowa State University, as well as more than two decades of engineering and managerial experience at prominent companies such as Hewlett-Packard. He is also the founder of e1 Solutions, a Vancouver-based online business

software solution company.

Professor Khormae also organizes a quarterly exposition where Computer Science and Engineering students can present their ideas for projects, which can range from bark-cancelling noise machines that can mute a neighbor's noisy dog to mobile apps that help students with time management. "He loves working with students and helping them complete their projects," said President Knight.



Karla Sylwester with fellow dental hygiene professor Brenda Walstead.

### **Karla Sylwester**

Professor Karla Sylwester, who is retiring later this year, has been the lead restorative instructor in Clark's Dental Hygiene program for more than 30 years. "She is regionally and nationally known for her teaching skills," said President Knight. "People call from all over the U.S. to get help from her for their board exams."

Sylwester regularly organizes group activities to help boost morale and student success, including her annual Halloween bowling extravaganza and her Monday night "Carving with Karla" sessions to help students pass their restorative board exams. Her no-nonsense demeanor has won her fans among students and



faculty alike. "Because she cares, she's tell you like it is," President Knight said. "I really appreciate that."



Audra Rowton

### **Audra Rowton**

Audra Rowton began working in Clark's Purchasing department 13 years ago. She is now the department's secretary senior. Her work ethic began early: She earned her associate degree in secretarial science at Rio Hondo College in Whittier, California, while also working full-time.

"I love Clark College because I work with a lot of great people," said Rowton. "I really enjoy working with the faculty and being available to help the students with their questions."



Dean of STEM, Peter Williams; Vice President of Instruction Dr. Tim Cook; Jim Watkins; and Director of Facilities Services, Tim Petta.

### **Jim Watkins**

Project Manager Jim Watkins has been responsible for managing and seeing through to completion many of the college's large capital projects, including the Clark Center at Washington State University Vancouver and Clark College at Columbia Tech Center (both of which came in on time and under budget, Knight noted). Currently Watkins is overseeing the construction of the new STEM building on Clark's main campus, after which he will begin planning Clark's new North County campus.

"He has earned a reputation for his thorough knowledge of all aspects of facility planning, design, and construction; his attention to detail; and his problem-solving skills," said President Knight. "He has taken on our biggest capital projects with enthusiasm, perseverance, and a commitment to building the best possible facilities for our students, faculty, and staff."



Sue Williams

## **Sue Williams**

Sue Williams began her career at Clark in 1996 as a Human Resources Assistant Senior before becoming a Recruiting Manager, then Assistant Director of Human Resources, until moving to her current position as Associate Director of Human Resources. “She is the expert in HR policy and practices for the college,” said President Knight. “She heads the training, recruitment, hiring efforts and the benefits team of the college efficiently and with a true team spirit.”

Knight commended Williams for her “open, honest, consistent and fair” way of handling Classified Staff and Association for Higher Education discipline and grievance issues, and that “she is a huge asset to the college, supporting the students and employees without hesitation and always with a smile.”

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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## **A Decade of Service**



During her decade as a Clark College trustee, Sherry Parker has been a frequent presence at the college.

Ever since she first became a member of the Clark College Board of Trustees in 2003, Sherry Parker has been a vital presence at the college, where she has faithfully attended not just board meetings but also Opening Days, State of the College addresses, cultural events, Commencement ceremonies—even when inmates were celebrating earning their GEDs through Clark at Larch Correctional Facility, Sherry Parker was there.

Last Thursday, however, Parker attended her last board meeting, as her tenure has officially expired. There was little fanfare at the event; Clark College President Bob Knight had hosted a private celebration at his home that Monday to thank Parker for her decade-long service to the college. Even so, as each trustee rose in turn to speak, it became clear how valuable Parker has been to the board.

“Sherry Parker was Clark College at the state level,” said

Trustee Jada Rupley, referring to Parker's role as a tireless committee member of the statewide Trustees Association of Community and Technical Colleges.



Clark College Trustee Jack Burkman, Trustee Emeritus Sherry Parker, alumna Dena Brill, Trustee Royce Pollard and Trustee Rekah Strong at the 2014 State of the College address.

That work earned her a TACTC Trustee Leadership Award earlier this year. Her nomination for the award cited her work in helping the college complete several key initiatives including the construction and opening of Clark College at Columbia Tech Center and the opening of the Oliva Family Early Learning Center, adding that she "has been a central figure in keeping the college focused on the student experience and student success. She is truly an advocate for students."

Parker's focus on students was due in part to her own experiences as a Clark student. She enrolled in the college in 1981, soon after she moved to Vancouver due to her husband's job. Parker, who already had a bachelor's degree in education from the University of South Florida, realized she would need to improve her computer skills to compete in the modern job market. She earned her Associate of Applied Science degree in 1983 and wound up working for the college as well, working

part-time as a department secretary and teaching computer skills to mature learners through Clark's Corporate and Continuing Education.



Sherry Parker, *blue jacket*, could always be counted on to attend events during her decade-long tenure as a Clark College trustee.

Eventually, Parker moved on to other job opportunities, working as a substitute teacher, in advertising, as a legal secretary in the juvenile court system, and in the Clark County Clerk's office as Deputy Clerk. She was elected County Clerk in 2006 and served in that position until 2011.

In an email after the board meeting, Parker called the end of her tenure on the Board of Trustees "bittersweet."

"I would be happy to continue my service, but after almost 11 years, it is time for a new perspective on the board," she wrote. "I know [Michael] Ciraulo will do a great job as a trustee."

Ciraulo, who also attended Thursday's board meeting—his first—acknowledged during the speeches that he would have "big shoes to fill" in taking Parker's spot on the board. But even though Parker's time on the board is ending, she will continue to be a familiar presence at the college—in fact, she has already begun volunteering at the college's Corporate and

Continuing Education office.

“I will always be a member of the Penguin Nation,” Parker wrote, “and I will help out in any way I can.”

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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# **Icy                    Adventures                    in Microbiology**



Photo courtesy of Dr. Roberto Anitori

From one-celled organisms to imaginary elephants, we have much to learn from the non-human life forms around us. That is the theme of this year's season of Clark College's Faculty Speaker Series, "Microbes, Pets, and Puppets: What Animals Can Teach Us."

The series begins on October 30 at 4 p.m., when biology professor Dr. Roberto Anitori presents "Microbial Heroics in Antarctica" in the Ellis Dunn Community Room (Gaiser Hall room 213) on Clark College's main campus.

This presentation is a fascinating exploration of some rarely seen "extremophiles," microbes that have adapted to survive in places where most living things could not—in this case, the remote and lightless ice caves in an Antarctic volcano. Part travelogue, part scientific presentation, Dr. Anitori invites guests to voyage with him on his 2010 research expedition to



Mt. Erebus, the second-highest volcano in Antarctica. Through photos and stories, he will share his experiences training to survive in sub-zero temperatures, as well as his initial findings about the microbes living inside Mt. Erebus's caves—which could have implications for life in even more difficult-to-research regions, like the deep sea, areas far below the earth's crust, or even other planets.

“We think these ice caves are models for environments without light,” says Dr. Anitori. “Most life on earth depends on sunlight.”

Instead, these microbes survive on nutrients within the very rock itself—for example, digesting manganese and iron the way other organisms digest biological material. This discovery could, in turn, provide valuable insights into a little-understood aspect of Earth's ecology.

“Most people, when they think about microbes, they think about things that make you sick—or make yogurt or beer,” says Dr. Anitori. “But 95 percent of the microbes on this planet don't have anything to do with those things.”

This presentation is free and open to the public. Individuals who need accommodation due to a disability in order to fully participate in this event may contact Clark's Disability Support Services Office at 360-992-2314 or 360-991-0901 (video phone) or email [dss@clark.edu](mailto:dss@clark.edu) within one week of the event.

Future Faculty Speaker Series presentations include “Why Do We Need a Pet? Effects of animals on children's socio-emotional development” and “Bilingual Puppetry: a Project-Based Learning Exploration.”

**About Dr. Roberto Anitori**



Dr. Roberto Anitori

Dr. Roberto Anitori has spent many years studying extremophiles and other microbes. After earning both his bachelor's and doctoral degrees in Molecular Biology and Microbiology from the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, he worked in research labs at Macquarie University in Sydney and at Oregon Health and Science University. In addition to his work in Antarctica, he has researched extremophiles in other volcanoes, deep-sea vents, underground water tables, deserts, and radioactive hot springs; he wrote the first published description of microbial life in the radioactive Paralana hot spring of Australia. He has been invited to lecture by organizations including the Australian Society for Microbiology, the Geological Society of Australia, and NASA. In 2011, he received the Antarctica Service Medal from the National Science Foundation. Dr. Anitori began teaching microbiology at Clark in 2008 and received a tenure-track faculty appointment in 2013. He is the editor of the book *Extremophiles: Microbiology and Biotechnology* (2012, Horizon Press).

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# Exceptional Classified Staff Awards



Melissa Williams receives her Exceptional Classified Staff Award during Opening Day 2014.

Opening Day is traditionally the occasion for announcing the yearly Exceptional Classified Staff Awards, which recognize two classified employees for their contributions to Clark College. Recipients receive a glass plaque and \$1,000, funded through an anonymous donor's contributions to the Clark College Foundation.

For their "exemplary work performance, outstanding service to the college, a positive and cooperative spirit, and/or special achievements or contributions to the college," Enrollment Services Program Coordinator Melissa Williams and Facilities Services Custodian Derald Richards were named the winners of

the 2014-2015 Clark College Exceptional Classified Staff Awards.



President Knight presents Derald Richards with his Classified Excellence Award.

### **Derald Richards, Custodian**

Derald Richards was described in his nomination as “consistently performing at a level above and beyond the scope of his job.”

While Richards is naturally a quiet and retiring person, those who work with him regularly at Clark College at Columbia Tech Center have learned to value his cheerful attitude, helpful suggestions, and the way he takes pride in everything that is asked of him. One nominator wrote, “He will drop whatever he is doing to assist staff, faculty, or students. No matter how busy he is, he always greets everyone with a smile and never a complaint.”

Another coworker summed Richards up with just two words: “Super Wonderful!!!”



President Knight presents Melissa Williams with her Exceptional Classified Staff Award.

### **Melissa Williams, Enrollment Services Program Coordinator**

Whether they know it or not, probably every student who registers for classes at Clark has been supported in some way or another by Melissa Williams. Her nomination states that she “consistently goes far beyond what is expected of her job title to see that students, faculty, college staff, and the community get what they need. She earnestly engages in students’ experiences at Clark and has helped to create an environment of focused customer service, communication, and teamwork. Her communication skills have been instrumental in explaining policies and procedures, assisting new staff, keeping her coworkers in the loop when changes occur, and keeping everyone up to date on a daily basis. Her approach, keeping students as the forefront of what we do, has improved and enhanced Clark College’s ability to meet the changing needs of our student population. ... In truth, she is the very definition of an exemplary employee.”

Other nominees for 2014-2015 were: Scott Coffie, eLearning, Information Technology Specialist 4; Rose Gardner, Administrative Services, Office Assistant 3; Silvia Marinova, Business Technology, Instruction & Classroom Support

Technician 2; Vanessa Meyer, Behavioral & Social Sciences, Secretary Senior; Lynn Vanhoomissen, Security & Safety, Program Support Supervisor 1; Jennifer Vernon, Early Childhood Education, Program Specialist 3; and Heather White, Disability Support Services, Program Support Services Supervisor 2.

The Clark College Foundation instituted the yearly Exceptional Classified Staff and quarterly Classified Staff Excellence awards in 1997 to recognize exceptional staff members. Nominations may be submitted by classified, administrative and exempt staff; faculty; students; alumni; retirees; college trustees; and Foundation directors.

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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## **Presidential Coins**



President Bob Knight introduces the Presidential Coin recipients on Opening Day 2014.

In 2007, Clark College President Bob Knight introduced a new honor at Clark College: the presidential coin.

The coin is given to faculty and staff members who provide exemplary service to Clark students, the college and the community. The honorees are decided by the president and are kept secret until the names are announced—generally on Opening Day in the fall or during the annual State of the College address.

Five Clark College employees received Presidential Coins during Opening Day 2014 on September 10. They were:

## Kael Godwin



As a Research and Analytics Professional working within the college's Office of Planning & Effectiveness, Kael Godwin "transforms the way we use data so that we can make better decisions," said President Knight. In his seven years at Clark, Godwin has earned a reputation as someone who's "approachable and responsible ... and will do anything to help the college, even if it is outside his job description."

Knight also cited Godwin's key role in supporting the implementation of the college's new customer relations management software, and noted that many people at the college have remarked upon his strong work ethic and commitment to the college.



## Ron Hirt



Fiscal Analyst Ron Hirt began working at Clark College in 1983. In more than 30 years of service, he has become known not just for his daily runs around campus—no matter what the weather—but also for his expertise in finding any kind of information located in the college’s financial management system, regardless of how buried, obscure or complex it is. He has been a key player in many of the financial audits that the college has undergone – and passed, always helping to ensure there are no findings.

“The guy is meticulous,” President Knight said. “You can ask him for any kind of file and he knows right where it is. When I first came to Clark as a vice president, he was one of the people I knew I could go to for help.”

## **Susan Muir**



Student Affairs Administrative Assistant Susan Muir began working at Clark in 2007; through the years, her service to Clark has spanned many areas pertaining to her department, including retention programs, student conduct, behavioral intervention team, and the Veterans Resource Center. “In every situation, she follows through to make sure the students and programs are well-served,” said President Knight. “Her knowledge, skills, and abilities are known across the college

because of her willingness to provide a helping hand.”

Knight added that Muir is known for creating a calm and welcoming environment in her office that helps support students who arrive there in crisis, as well as for being willing to share her time and energy (not to mention her impressive stash of chocolate) with visitors to Student Affairs.



**Vicki Cheng**

Vicki Cheng, an Administrative Assistant in the Workforce, Career & Technical Education department, has been a Clark employee for 32 years. Her depth of experience is a great asset to her department and allows her to prioritize day-to-day issues effectively.

“She is always willing to step up and assist anyone who walks through the office door with impeccable customer service and a genuine desire to help,” said Knight. “She always makes a point to know and understand the projects across the unit so that she is capable of answering questions that may arise, and often offers suggestions that improve the end product.”

## Patti Serrano



Business Administration professor Patti Serrano is no stranger to honors at Clark: She was named one of the college's 2012-2013 Exceptional Faculty Award recipients. "She has been a rock in her division for 33 years and counting," said President Knight. "Through her leadership, she has formally and informally mentored faculty, staff and administrators."

Serrano has been a key participant in such important collegewide efforts as strategic planning, accreditation, and course development. Currently, she is leading her department's efforts to develop a new Bachelor of Applied Science degree in Management. "She is admired and respected by students, faculty, and staff alike," said President Knight.

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# Exceptional

# Faculty,

# Exceptional Stories



Clockwise from top left: Kelly Fielding, Chris Martins, Sarah Theberge, and Jim Wilkins-Luton.

A professor who never planned on going to college, A Web-savvy wiz who stays in touch with students on Twitter, an aspiring academic who turned his back on the ivory tower in favor of more hands-on teaching, and an experienced clinician who takes the mystery out of a much-misunderstood subject—these are the recipients of the 2013-2014 Clark College Exceptional Faculty Awards, which were announced during the college's 2014 Commencement ceremony and officially presented to their recipients during Opening Day activities on Sept. 10.

The Clark College Exceptional Faculty Awards are presented annually to full-time and part-time faculty members. This year the award recipients include two full-time tenured professors and two part-time adjunct instructors, whose detailed

biographies can be accessed through the links below:

- Kelly Fielding: The voice of experience
- Chris Martin: The technophile with human feeling
- Sarah Theberge: The accidental professor
- Jim Wilkins-Luton: The book-lover gone digital

The awards are made possible through an endowed trust fund established by the Washington State Legislature and the Clark College Exceptional Faculty Endowment Fund, which was established in 1993. That fund provides recognition of exemplary work performance, positive impact on students, professional commitment, and other contributions to the college. Nominations can be submitted by Clark College students, faculty, classified employees, administrators, alumni, Board members, and Foundation directors.

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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## **Exceptional Faculty Award spotlight: The technophile with human feeling**



Chris Martin has gathered the students from his Web Video Production class in the hallway outside their classroom to demonstrate how to set up an interview shot. One student—a burly guy with a baseball cap and gray beard—has affably agreed to stand in front of the camera as the “interviewee.”

“Now let’s think about camera height, because you can change things a lot depending on the angle you shoot your subject at,” Martin says, adjusting the camera’s tripod. “Do we want to set it lower and look up at him to give him that godlike angle? Because we all know Steve has a bit of a god complex—just kidding! Just kidding!”

The whole class, Steve included, cracks up, and then Martin continues, raising the tripod as he speaks. “You can do stuff like that,” he says. “You can look down on them, too. But typically, we want to meet the subject at their own level, to give them that human feeling.”



In many ways, that last line is an apt summation of Martin’s teaching philosophy—and the secret to his popularity with students, who nominated him in droves for Clark’s prestigious 2013-14 Exceptional Faculty Award.

“His patience and approach in bringing out the abilities in all his students, from the novice to the advanced, encourages respect for all,” wrote one nominator. “His emotional integrity allows him to act as a mentor and to also mirror the importance to students that he is also learning the ever-changing aspects of technology.”

“If you don’t care about who your students are or where they come from or what they actually know—and they know a lot—then you can’t help them,” says Martin, who teaches both Computer Technology and Computer Graphics Technology classes as an adjunct at Clark, as well as general business courses at Warner Pacific College. “What I like about teaching at Clark is you really get to know the students. When they go through hard times, you know about it.”

Martin also gets strong praise for his real-life experience as a web designer and videographer. He has spent more than eight years running his own multimedia studio, creating videos and web content for businesses, nonprofits, and artists. He also produces a regular online documentary video series called *Innovators of Vancouver* that showcases leaders in Southwest Washington.

Martin, who holds a bachelor's degree in Media Arts and Animation from the Art Institute of Portland and a master's degree in Management and Organizational Leadership from Warner Pacific, regularly shares stories from his professional career to illustrate class material. A self-described "big experimenter," he often tries out new tools and methods in his teaching—including Twitter, which Martin has used to create online discussions about class material among his students.

"It's just a way of being accessible," Martins says. "I think it helps students feel connected to me a little more."

Or, to put it another way: It's Martin's way of giving his students that "human feeling" in the digital age.

Learn more about the other 2013-14 Exceptional Faculty Award recipients.

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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## **Exceptional Faculty Award spotlight: The accidental professor**





We've all heard the cliché that kids say the darndest things. But people rarely point out its corollary: So do adults. As an Early Childhood Education professor, Sarah Theberge says she is often just as surprised by what her students express in the classroom as she is by what children in the college's Child & Family Studies program say on the playground.

"I'm just surprised over and over again by how many things I hadn't thought of," Theberge says as she stands on that playground surrounded by running children. "The way that students approach the things we talk about reminds me that there's no one right answer to so much of what we're studying. I really do see us as 'co-learners' who are all learning together—and I'm learning right along with them. It's one of my favorite parts of teaching."

It's also one of the things students mentioned repeatedly in nominating Theberge for Clark College's prestigious Exceptional Faculty Award, which Theberge received for the

2013-14 year. The award was announced at Clark's 2014 Commencement ceremony and officially bestowed at the college's Opening Day festivities on September 10.

"She is honest, she is real, she is not only a teacher but an inspiration and a friend to all her students," wrote one nominator. "She brings passion to her work with children and with her students, and ignites the passion in all of us."

Students also mention Theberge's empathy and her strong commitment to serving as an academic advisor to students in the ECE program. When Theberge explains how she became a professor, it becomes clear why she is able to connect so strongly with her students and empathize with the challenges they face: After all, she faced them too.

Theberge never set out to become a professor. "It was the farthest thing from my mind," she says, laughing. Rather, her initial ambition was much more basic: She needed a job.

"I was a single parent without any college background or schooling, and a friend of mine had a childcare center," Theberge says. "I just thought it was a place where I could have my kids there and still work. But from the very first day, I fell in love with it."

A friend encouraged her to enroll in Clark's ECE program. "I said, 'Oh no. We don't do college in my family,'" Theberge recalls. "She literally took me by the hand and dragged me to Clark. And I've never left."

In 1992, Theberge graduated with honors from Clark with an Associate of Applied Science degree in ECE. She went on to complete both a bachelor's and master's program from Pacific Oaks College while working in Clark's CFS program, first as a program aide and then as an adjunct faculty member. Her roles and responsibilities continued to expand over the years, and in 2000 she was granted tenure at Clark. Throughout the years, she has continued to attend conferences and workshops to keep

up-to-date on current teaching practices in her field. She also presents her own research at conferences; currently she has been delving into the complex issues surrounding children's concepts of gender identity. Additionally, she serves on the board of directors for YWCA Clark County and has been instrumental in creating a library at CFS to help promote children's literacy.

It's a long way from the young single mother who just wanted a job. "That's why I love advising," Theberge says. "I hear similar stories to mine from students—people looking for opportunity, looking for help in making their passion a reality. It's just so rewarding to sit with that and to walk alongside them on their journey."

Learn more about the other 2013-14 Exceptional Faculty Award recipients.

*Photo: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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**Exceptional Faculty Award  
spotlight: The book-lover  
gone digital**



Exceptional Faculty Award recipient Jim Wilkins-Luton can tell you the exact moment when the course of his career changed. He was in his final year of graduate studies at Gonzaga University, listening to an English professor discuss Milton in pedantic detail.

At the time, Wilkins-Luton was well on his way to following that professor's path. He'd already been accepted to a Ph.D. program in English literature at Stony Brook University in New York, after which he would aim for a professorship at an elite university where he could happily discuss his own favorite authors in pedantic detail. "It was all lined up," Wilkins-Luton recalls. "I'd been accepted; I had my funding in place; I was going to focus on either medieval or Victorian literature. Everything was going according to plan."

But lately, Wilkins-Luton had begun having doubts about that plan. It started when he took on a part-time job teaching homeless youth to make some money during grad school. "I had

all these stereotypes about what these kids would be like,” he says. “I’m ashamed to admit it, but the night before I started the job I was worried they would give me head lice. And then that first day I went to work and came home just exhausted and devastated by these kids. And I started thinking, Maybe the world didn’t need another Shakespeare professor. Maybe the world needed people who were willing to teach—to teach the people no one wanted to teach.”

Which brings us back to that Milton seminar. Wilkins-Luton found himself staring at the lecturing professor. “I’m not even kidding: This guy actually had leather elbow patches on his tweed jacket, and he was expounding on some particular sentence Milton wrote,” he recalls. “And I remember thinking, ‘That’s my future. I don’t want any part of that. What I want to do is help.’”

As fate would have it, there was a poster advertising opportunities to teach English in Japan on the seminar room’s walls. Wilkins-Luton called his wife as soon as class let out, and soon after graduation, the two of them moved to Japan, where they spent the next seven years teaching English. Once the couple returned to the U.S. and settled in the Portland area, it was a natural progression for Wilkins-Luton to begin teaching at a private international school, and then English as a Second Language at Clark, and then pre-college and college-level English. He earned tenure in 2006.

Wilkins-Luton says he was surprised and honored to receive a 2013-14 Exceptional Faculty Award. The award was announced at Clark’s 2014 Commencement ceremony and officially bestowed at the college’s Opening Day festivities on September 10. Student nominators described a professor they called “funny” and “friendly,” who “makes all students completely comfortable in the classroom.”

“I love to teach,” says Wilkins-Luton. “I love the classroom. I love the engagement with students.” He is sitting in his

book-lined office at Clark, which amply proves that he hasn't entirely escaped the tropes of the English professor. ("I have a lot more books at home," he admits sheepishly, casting an eye at the seven shelves of volumes arranged in meticulous alphabetical order by author. "These are mostly the ones I don't want my kids reading.")

Yet despite his love of both printed books and face-to-face teaching, Wilkins-Luton recently moved to teaching entirely online. "I think you have to make transitions sometimes to stay sharp," he explains. "Also, I'd been reading some research discussing how the face-to-face classroom favors the extrovert—the person who's willing to raise their hand and speak up in class. In the online environment, the introvert and extrovert become equal. As someone with introvert tendencies of my own, I liked that idea."

Wilkins-Luton says that at first, he was concerned that the online classroom would stifle the sense of humor and personal engagement that he practices in face-to-face teaching. But in fact, he says, online teaching has allowed him to give even more personalized attention to individual students. "If they ask me a question, I send them back a two-paragraph answer," he says. "And yeah, it might have a joke in it. Because you know what? Students don't need gravitas; they need a reason to learn."

Learn more about the other 2013-14 Exceptional Faculty Award recipients.

*Photo: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*