



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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FACULTY RECOGNITION THROUGH NISOD

A successful program that acknowledges faculty contributions is critically important to any college dedicated to having an engaged, enthusiastic, and committed faculty. Most colleges have some program of faculty recognition. Many give cash prizes or bestow prestigious appointments to titled positions, such as endowed chairs. While faculty may choose a career in teaching for the intrinsic satisfaction of their interactions with students rather than for financial rewards other professions may offer, it is a hallmark of good administration to recognize and reward the individual achievements of exemplary faculty performance. Manatee Community College's (MCC) approach utilizes the NISOD Excellence Awards as a component of our faculty recognition program.

In addition to a faculty promotion system, Staff and Program Development mini-grants, and annual step increases, MCC has used the NISOD award annually as a means of identifying and rewarding faculty for their substantive contributions to the college. Awards are made based on NISOD's commitment to supporting excellence in teaching, learning, and leadership. Individuals are selected based on NISOD's aim to enrich learning experiences for students; to enhance the standards of excellence throughout the academic community; and to recognize, celebrate, and reward outstanding educators and their accomplishments.

While many colleges utilize interdisciplinary committees to evaluate nominations and recommend awards, MCC has developed a unique process in which former NISOD award recipients review applications and recommend the selection of the next year's award recipients from a set of collegewide nominations. Award recipients are primarily teaching faculty, although several college administrators and career employees have been chosen over the years. In fact, my own nomination by faculty for this award has become one of my most cherished honors.

The NISOD award recipients are invited to attend the

annual conference in Austin, Texas. Travel expenses for attendance at this conference are fully funded by our college foundation. In addition to the award recipients, all faculty are encouraged to submit proposals for presentations. The college president has been extremely supportive, utilizing Staff and Program Development monies to fund the two or three presenters that typically attend each year, in addition to our award recipients. For all participants, this conference is an experience that refreshes, renews, and confirms their career choice to serve.

At our opening day faculty meetings, we show the NISOD video, which powerfully captures the community college spirit. Following the video presentation, all of the current award recipients are asked to stand, and I give a brief description of each of their contributions. They are proud to be recognized by their peers, and the entire faculty is uplifted.

Another component of MCC's Faculty Recognition program is the Vice President's Academic Excellence Award. This particular recognition is given to a single senior faculty member who has remained engaged in college activities, demonstrated long-standing teaching excellence, and shown outstanding leadership. While it is understandable that senior faculty may become complacent or fall prey to "burnout," there are those special individuals who, in spite of many years of teaching introductory courses, are as dedicated, enthusiastic and excited about teaching as they were their very first year. It is towards faculty like this that the Vice President's award is directed.

Along with receiving the Vice President's Academic Excellence Award and the trip to NISOD, the Vice President's award winner serves as Mace Bearer for our graduation ceremonies during the following school year. The symbolic gesture of the Mace Bearer leading the entire faculty into the commencement ceremony has touched the hearts of each of the previous award recipients.

In addition to serving as Mace Bearers, the previous recipients are asked to speak at a meeting of our Board of Trustees about why they teach at a community college. These inspirational presentations give the board



excellent insight into the commitment and dedication of our faculty. Each presentation has received a standing ovation. Last year's speech, by Professor Jane Jones of the English, Reading and Languages Department, is but one example of why board members are so moved.

Why Be a Community College Teacher?

Currently I am in the process of reading over 80 applications from all over the country and from almost all of our current adjuncts for two positions teaching English at MCC. The starting salary is slightly over \$30,000 for someone with at least six years of college, often eight or nine. What is it that attracts highly trained academics to community colleges?

Obviously it's not the money. My husband, who is a repertory actor, and I often ruefully joke about the financial prospects of our careers in A&E—arts and education. We're depending on the lottery or Publisher's Clearinghouse to fund a dream house on the beach, a pied a terre in London, or a trip around the world. Maybe we could swing one of those if we had no children that oddly enough want to eat, buy trendy clothes, and go to college themselves. Yet, neither one of us regrets for an instant that we chose jobs we love to do rather than those that would make us rich. So what is it that makes community college teaching worth the trade off?

First of all, I'm never bored—frustrated sometimes, annoyed occasionally, but never bored. Every day is different, and every day presents its own challenge, whether it's learning something new about an old subject, wrestling with a technology glitch, figuring out an innovative way to present material that will grab a class's or even just a student's attention, or confronting a surprising insight arising from a class discussion. The variegated texture of my job arises not only from the subject material I teach, but also from the students who are learning in my classes.

Community colleges are not exclusive clubs—we do not cater only to bright, ambitious kids who expect to run the world (mind you, I'm not denigrating these colleges; my son just graduated from Georgetown). We welcome all who are interested in education or working towards a new career. Firemen and policemen, nurses and paramedics, pilots and fishermen, computer whizzes and aspiring accountants, Ukrainian immigrants and Tunisian foreign students, veterans and kids floundering about what to do with the rest of their lives have been in my classes. I've learned as much from them as they have probably learned from me. I can help them with the intricacies of sentence punctuation and the themes of medieval literature, but they have opened new vistas into worlds that I would otherwise never

have experienced. My students nurture foster children, comfort hospice patients, conduct undercover investigations, and feed the homeless. They may not end up running the government or a big business, but they are the support and scaffolding of this community.

I treasure the spontaneity of what I do, what happens in my classes, and what happens on campus in the interaction with my colleagues. Closure comes at the end of every semester, and new faces and new challenges present themselves anew at the beginning of every semester.

It's rewarding to watch a light go on in someone's head when he grasps a new idea, to see a tentative returning student gain confidence in her own ability to master skills she had been fearful of, to observe reluctant freshmen become interested in learning.

Finally, community colleges are cooperative institutions. We are not about competition—either among our students or among our colleagues. I appreciate working in an atmosphere where we are focused on improving the common good rather than vying for the glittering prizes. Certainly, we are here to enable individuals to achieve their personal goals and to nurture dreams of excellence, but our aim is to do this for *all* our students, not just those who are interested in winning. We are here to help each other and learn from each other, not to best each other. We all have to travel on this planet together, so we might as well work to make the journey an enlightening one. Community colleges help society do just that.

Using NISOD's well-respected celebration of excellence, MCC has been able to recognize faculty, on an annual basis, for a wide range of achievements, in a way that is not only meaningful to the recipients but to our faculty as a whole. Members of MCC's Board of Trustees and the community, as a result of the publicity surrounding these awards, have become keenly aware of the fine faculty associated with our college. And the entire college shares my pride when we see the increasing number of our faculty with a NISOD medallion of teaching excellence adorning their academic regalia at commencement activities.

John F. Rosen, *Vice President of Academic Affairs*

For further information, contact the author at Manatee Community College, P. O. Box 1849, Bradenton, FL 34207. e-mail: rosenj@mccfl.edu