



MEDIA RELEASE

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Staff and Faculty Win 4 Awards at Virtual Spring Brunch'In

DES MOINES, Wash. — Each year, Highline College recognizes exemplary staff and faculty who make a difference in students' lives. This year, four staff and faculty members were honored for their professional excellence and achievements at a Virtual Spring Brunch'In, held June 11, 2020. This annual Outstanding Employee of the Year Award event was made virtual this year to practice safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees are nominated through a confidential process by Highline students and/or peers.

Not only were award recipients acknowledged in front of their peers, but they were awarded \$1,500 each, courtesy of the Highline College Foundation.

Tenured Faculty of the Year: Maurea Brown

Maurea Brown, a tenured Adult Basic Education/English as a Second Language (ABE/ESL) instructor, was recognized for her innovation and willingness to support faculty members during the transition to online and remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not only is she an excellent instructor, but her peers describe her as someone who is open to trying new ways of teaching, which is exhibited in her "Bridge to College" and "Hybrid ESL" classes.

"She embraces new ideas and ways of doing things," said one person who nominated her for the award. "She is never stuck in a rut. From a new student intake process that she devised when she was department coordinator, to I-BEST nursing assistant classes, to Bridge to College classes, to hybrid English classes she taught for the first time at Highline, she is not afraid to try something new. She tries it, evaluates it and makes changes where needed. She is the epitome of a lifelong learner."

Brown also stepped up when it came time to helping educate other instructors on how to use various technologies to transition to online and remote learning due to the COVID-19

pandemic. Even going so far as to take spring quarter off from teaching classes, so that she could help her colleagues, Brown has inspired other instructors at Highline to change the way they approach their courses.

“I really don’t know what this quarter would have been like (for me or my students) without everything I’ve learned through Brown’s training classes, Zoom meetings and on-on-one support,” said another person who also nominated her for the award. “She is simply astounding.”

According to her Highline biography, Brown has a master’s in education with an emphasis in adult education and training from Seattle University. Her bachelor’s degree is in American ethnic studies from the University of Washington, and she was an exchange student at the Universidad de Guadalajara during that time. Brown later spent a year in Los Angeles developing Spanish literacy programs as an AmeriCorps Vista volunteer. Working in adult education since 1998, she is committed to teaching English to speakers of other languages and supporting faculty in integrating technology in instruction.

Adjunct Faculty of the Year: Lucas Wildner

Lucas Wildner, an English instructor at Highline College, was recognized for his support of students and passion for teaching.

A former student, who took an English 101 class with Wildner, said he “always took the time to thoroughly explain the material and made himself available to answer any questions before, during and after class” in addition to his office hours.

That same former student also said Lucas’ feedback was incredibly valuable and “set the tone” for her college experience as a first-generation/nontraditional college student.

Colleagues echo that sentiment in that they’ve seen him interact with students in a “straight-forward, honest and kind way” and he gives “careful, genuine criticism” that students receive well.

Wildner has also worked on the National Poetry Month committee and is a voice for adjunct faculty, meaning part-time and/or faculty whose work is contractual, which is evident from a past presentation to Instruction Cabinet on the topic of adjunct workspaces, and the important role they play in supporting and advising students.

Since that presentation, an Adjunct Faculty Task Force has been formed and Wildner continues to be involved in conversations around professional development, class selection, contract timing and compensation for non-instruction work.

Wildner has been at Highline College for four years and says the student community is one of the college’s strengths and one of the reasons he continues to work at Highline.

Exempt Staff of the Year: Michelle McClendon

Michelle McClendon, a Workforce Education Services reentry adviser, was recognized for her advocacy for students, especially those who have faced significant challenges in their lives.

As a reentry adviser, McClendon is passionate about providing education access to formerly incarcerated students.

“My passion is social justice, equity and equality while incorporating restorative justice and trauma-informed practices within higher education and communities,” McClendon said. “I would like to see mass incarceration go away for Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC).”

McClendon also works as the “game changer leader” for the South King County-based Civil Survival Project, which is an organization operated by the Public Defenders Association and is run by formerly incarcerated people and those who were once involved in the legal system.

“Her advocacy at the Legislative level has resulted in a couple of different bills that passed into law,” said the person who nominated her. “These new laws will help formerly incarcerated individuals access education and other vital services more easily than before.”

Those four laws, which were written in collaboration with other organizations, have addressed barriers for formerly incarcerated individuals, which include housing, education, employment and legal financial obligations.

“It has been very rewarding to share the tools of how laws are made and how people are impacted by policies and laws with our reentry population here at Highline,” she said.

McClendon has also mentored women of color on and off campus and embodies all of Highline College’s Core Themes, but especially Core Theme 3: Build valuable relationships and establish a meaningful presence within Highline College’s communities, her nominator said.

The Kent resident has worked at Highline College for six years. She holds a medical assistant certificate, a pharmacy technician certificate, a certified nursing assistant certificate and she is a certified peer counselor within Washington state. While she continues to take educational courses on mental illness as a member of the National Alliance on Mental Illnesses (NAMI), she is currently working on her AAS degree in human services at Highline College.

“Highline College is a safe space for second chances,” McClendon said. “I look forward to all of the amazing growth and collaborations to come in the future.”

Classified Staff of the Year: Vicky Montgomery

Vicky Montgomery, a Continuing Education program specialist, was recognized for her hard work to help students transition to remote and online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over spring quarter, the Continuing Education department offered a free, online class for students to learn more about remote learning tools, such as Canvas and Zoom. But “it was Vicky who made it possible for all these students to register,” said the person who nominated her for the award. “She spent hours creating over 15 classes in SMS, while registering over 300-plus students in their respective class.”

Not only does Montgomery care about helping students achieve their goals, but she has a positive attitude with every student interaction and has sincere concern if faced with a student problem.

Montgomery has worked at Highline College for more than six years and is described as “organized, dependable, loyal and dedicated” by her peers. The Auburn resident recently completed her bachelor’s degree in Information Technology Administrative Management with Central Washington University and credits her own personal journey as a student for developing her passion toward ensuring student success at Highline.

“Throughout my personal journey as a student, I understand the needs of our students and how important, as college staff, it is to be patient and listen to the students’ as well as our colleagues needs,” Montgomery said, “while always responding with compassion and kindness — especially during these unprecedented times.”

Professional Excellence at Highline

Highline College has been honoring employees for more than 30 years, beginning with faculty in the 1987–88 academic year. In 1990–91, an award was added for staff members. Now, four awards are presented, two for faculty (adjunct and tenured) and two for staff (classified and exempt).

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Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves more than 16,500 students. With over 70 percent students of color, Highline is the most diverse higher education institution in the state. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education, basic skills and applied bachelor’s degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.