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TWELVE FACULTY MEMBERS RECOGNIZED WITH R.O.A.R. AWARDS

October 14, 2020

By Amanda May

At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, twelve faculty members at Lindenwood were recognized for going above and beyond to help others in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The R.O.A.R. Awards were given out at the faculty return meeting (via zoom) on August 18, 2020.

“This award is given to a faculty member for their Resiliency, Outstanding Acts of kindness and encouragement, and for Rising to the occasion during unprecedented times,” said Professor Annie Alameda, Faculty Council Chair. The awards entailed a special recognition at the welcome back full faculty meeting, as well as a framed certificate to be announced and virtually given to the recipients at the upcoming full faculty meeting on October 7, 2020. Professor Alameda continued, “The deans worked with their respective faculty council representative to nominate anyone that they felt met the description and should be recognized by their colleagues.”

Professor Lynda Leavitt from the School of Education was surprised when she heard her name in the list of recipients. “To be recognized by your peers is truly an honor - there are so many individuals in the SOE who truly stepped up and went way beyond what they needed to do and always do - so many!” Leavitt went on to describe the importance of going above and beyond for her students. “Seeing each student as an individual is critical for their success! My hope is the student would expect nothing less, as an educator, my students continually challenge me - to strive towards my best.”

From the School of Sciences, awarded faculty members included chemistry professors Dr. Darla Jia and Dr. Jennifer Firestine, as well as mathematics Professor Rebecca Heinen. Dr. Jia and Dr. Firestine collaborated together to make masks for the community.

This project was meaningful for Dr. Jia; her friend, Sheri, passed away a few years ago from cancer. Sheri’s husband, Chad, gave Dr. Jia all of Sheri’s fabric. “I knew that Sheri would have been making masks, and so I felt that it was appropriate to use the fabric she had given me to give to others.” Dr. Jia, with the help of her family and Dr. Firestine and her family were able to make over 1400 masks, 1200 of which have been donated. “Anyone that expressed a need/want for a mask, I gave them a mask and just asked them to pay it forward in whatever way they were able. In some cases, that led to

different donations, donations of supplies so I could make more, and just a spirit of giving and helping whomever was in need.”

“I measured and cut the fabric that was provided from various sources,” Dr. Firestine explained. “My son ironed in the pattern and then we passed them to Darla Jia to be sewn. We then donated the completed masks to various facilities (nursing homes, public health, schools etc.) We also have some available here at LU.... It is something I would have done anyway but it is always nice to be appreciated.”

Dr. Jia and Dr. Firestine’s efforts inspired fellow School of Science faculty member Professor Rebecca Heinen to crochet 730 buttonless ear savers, which protect the back of ears from elastic bands, and have donated them across four states. “I was excited to be honored with the ROAR award. I ultimately just enjoyed making the ear savers and watching my yarn stash disappear, but it was awesome to be recognized and appreciated formally.”

Dr. Ana Schnellmann from the School of Humanities was incredibly humbled by the award. “As an older professor who has been working on-ground for 33 years and who has minimal experience on-line, I had a sharp learning curve. Receiving the award makes me feel valued and validated. I have worked very hard to make the necessary changes, and it’s nice to see that work recognized by my peers and supervisors.” When asked why it was important for her to go beyond for her students, she said, “Teaching is not a job; it is a vocation and a responsibility. I believe that when I sign a contract, I am signing an agreement to do my very best for my students, in and out of the classroom. I know students will consciously or subconsciously take us professors as role models, so since I want my students to be high performers and be able to navigate any challenge that comes their way, including the Covid-19 crisis, it is on me and my colleagues to extend every effort to help our students. It is on me and my colleagues as well to be positive, upbeat, and innovative. I believe the vast majority of professors at LU feel this way. We love what we do. We love our students. As a result, we will go over and above.”

Two faculty members of the School of Arts, Media, and Communications were recognized, Chris Phillips and Joseph Weber. Chris Phillips is an assistant technical director for Lindenwood, and the transition to teaching online posed many obstacles. Despite this, he was determined to help others.

“The shift to remote working drastically changed my job last spring. Since I wasn’t able to do the job the same way that I normally would, I needed to adapt to the new work environment and stepped in to help where I could. This involved helping faculty and students shift over to the virtual classroom, taking the time to update CAD drawings and working together with the various departments of the school of AMC to start planning for the safe return of students in the fall.” Furthermore, Mr. Phillips hopes receiving this award sets an example for his students and inspires them to always be helpful. “I want them to see that if you are able to step in and do more, you don’t need to wait to be asked to do that. If you have the skills and knowledge to help out and make some things

better, then you should do just that. I think it can make a big impact on them seeing that going above and beyond for them shouldn't be isolated incidents, but something that should happen on a regular basis."

"I would hope it came across as gracious but I would imagine it read as generally surprised," said Professor Joseph Weber in response to his reaction in receiving the award. Along with his other teammates in the AMC, Professor Weber did a lot of active problem solving. "Very little of this has been easy but seeing as the endgame has been student focused, it has been extremely rewarding.... As a team, I think we take a huge amount of pride in a good day's work. All of us are extremely student focused and understand the returned value our work gives to our Lindenwood students."

Three faculty members from the School of Health Sciences were awarded: Darrell DeMartino, Kate Tessmer, and Katie Shoff. Darrell DeMartino is an associate professor and the Program Director of Paramedicine. Throughout the summer and this fall semester, Professor DeMartino has been serving on both the Pandemic Preparedness Team (PPT) and the COVID Response Team (CERT).

"There is a lot of time dedicated by many individuals to provide insights and help make decisions to ensure our campus was and continue to remain safe for employees and students. Everyday we meet and provide input to the evolving situation. It is a lot of hours spent by a team of devoted individuals. One of the more challenging aspects is keeping abreast of CDC and local guidelines as more information is ascertained about COVID. We work hard to implement the best recommendations for campus during the pandemic.... As a nurse and paramedic, I am devoted to helping others. I bring in this unique knowledge and experience from healthcare to the team. Serving on these teams is a core of who I am."

Dr. Katie Shoff has also been a part of the PPT. "It was time intensive work, but I find that when you are passionate about something, it makes it easier to put in the hard work. I am passionate about public health and this was a great opportunity to work with a committed, diverse team of faculty and staff to help LU excel during these uncertain times.... It is a great honor to receive this award. I view my service on this committee as a professional responsibility as a public health practitioner, so I was not expecting recognition. However, it is always nice to be recognized for hard work."

Dr. Kate Tessmer was surprised and honored to receive the R.O.A.R award. "Receiving this award is an extremely nice recognition and validation for the work we put forth to help our students.... I always want to go above and beyond for our students – it's my job. During a time like the present, it makes it all more relevant for us to step up and help out whenever and however we can."

"Let me begin by saying that working in academia, I see a ton of people that on a regular basis go above and beyond the parameters of their job descriptions, hint it is rather difficult for me to consider my efforts to be truly exceptional," said Professor Karolina Schneider from the Plaster School of Business. "However, I am honored that

the person that nominated me did recognize the energy I have spent on reaching out to students, offering advice and guidance, even shelter while retaining a sense of humor and a positive attitude during the months of the pandemic.”

Laura Wehmer-Callahan, also from the Plaster School of Business & Entrepreneurship, was awarded as well. “I have worked with international students for my entire career, so I’ve seen how difficult it is for them to be far away from family and friends while starting a new journey. In the spring and summer, this became even more difficult for them, so I just made sure to check in weekly and to be there for them in a way that they felt comfortable in letting me know if they needed anything.... My favorite part of this job truly is getting to know students and being there for them when they need me, so receiving an award for doing just that feels awesome.”

A big congratulations and thank you to all of these faculty members!