

Nominee: Patricia Kiernan; adjunct faculty in the History and Social Science and Math departments.

Nominator: Sara Blomquist; adjunct faculty in the English Department.

Brief Statement:

I have known Patty for several semesters, and in that time she has been nothing but dedicated to her students. I have been witness to the hours of prep that goes into each of her classes, from editing and re-editing her tests to ensure maximum comprehension to recording her lectures for flipped-classroom learning. Patty operates at the forward edge of pedagogical research and technique to create an inclusive and active learning environment.

Patty's education and training has focused on pedagogy, and her experience as a tutor has given her insight into student learning, especially with regards to learning difficulties and learning anxieties. She crafts her assignments with the students in mind, checking and double checking her language and instructions to make sure they are clear and tailored to the student population at Middlesex County College. Her shining moments, however, happen when creating tests for her math courses; the tests are in comic sans (to reduce stress and aid in dyslexic reading), in "plain English" (to insure comprehension and reduce test stress), and designed to be challenging but not impossible. Nothing inhibits student learning like early failure, and Patty works hard to make sure her students learn early that they can learn difficult material.

Patty also is a strong proponent of a flipped classroom. Last year, she taught a faculty seminar on the subject. I was in attendance, so not only can I attest to the quality of information, but to the quality of her teaching style. The lecture she gave was on using technology to "flip" the classroom. In other words, she taught us how to use various technologies to put the learning in the hands of the students before they come to class, so that class time may be used to actively engage with students through activity and discussion. Throughout the lecture, she was energetic and moved about the classroom. She interacted with those in her class directly as she drew us into discussion before giving us a chance to directly apply what she had shown us. I know from watching her prep for class that this was not a one off event. She often assigns her students readings and videos, often of brief lectures that she records herself, so that in class they may apply the information directly. She once even taught those present in the adjunct office about blind-spots and perception by having us try the activity she had planned for the day, both showing that teaching is something that comes naturally and readily to her as well as showing her willingness to test and re-test her technique.

Patty finds inspiration wherever she goes; often in casual conversation she will stop, point at me, and say something along the lines of "Oh! That! That's a perfect example of X! I'll have to use that with my students!" or, "We covered that in class yesterday! They really seemed to enjoy discussing X". Everything seems to be a learning tool with her, whether it is applying psychological theories to popular movies, or using teaching statistics through Disney, Patty uses the world around her to teach her students in such a way that they can apply her lessons to their lives, thus learning the information for the long term.

As mentioned before, Patty taught a seminar on technology in the classroom. I have seen her use power point presentations and videos, created by herself others, to great effect. She uses whiteboard apps on her iPad to display in real-time how to solve problems. She uses infographics to convey information, reinforcing their reading. She uses QR codes to link students to even more learning experiences. She keeps a website filled with relevant information, designed according to the latest research in cognition and comprehension; every design choice made was done so to increase readability for those with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia.

For all these reasons, I believe Patty deserves the Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award. She is active and innovative in the classroom, she uses technology and pedagogy to create a welcoming learning environment, she puts constant effort into preparing for her classes and assessing and grading student work afterwards, and most of all, she is a natural educator, who teaches those around her wherever she goes.