

Professor wins Outstanding Faculty Award

Ginger Hood, former assistant editor

[March 2021] The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) Outstanding Faculty Award is an award given to faculty members who “have a demonstrated record of superior accomplishments in teaching, research, knowledge integration, and public service,” according to the SCHEV website. This year, there were 72 faculty members nominated; only 12 of those 72 were recipients. Among these recipients was Jennifer Koster, an English professor and the writing center coordinator at PVCC.

“PVCC salutes Jenny Koster on this tremendous accomplishment,” said PVCC President Frank Friedman in an article about the award. “Professor Koster is a talented, dedicated faculty member who is committed to providing opportunity for students. She goes the extra mile to help all students succeed. She epitomizes the quality of faculty that students encounter at PVCC.”

In addition to teaching and acting as coordinator of the Writing Center, Koster has been the coordinator of the Virginia chapter of the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) and the Virginia representative to the SWCA Board for the past four years. She also helped initiate Virginia’s first statewide tutor collaboration, TuColla-VA, in 2020.

“We call it TuColla — it sounds like a music festival,” said Koster. “It was in October, and we invited tutors from all around the state to submit proposals ... we had representatives from 16 schools in Virginia, and I think 70 people signed up. It was a great week.”

Of the 12 recipients of the Outstanding Faculty Award, Koster is the only recipient from a community college. “It’s nice to be recognized, particularly in a community college. We often get a little overlooked,” Koster said. However, when it comes to personal recognition, Koster is more hesitant. “I’m trying not to, but it feels funny to get [the award] because so many of my colleagues are

such talented and deserving people. It’s strange...I’ve struggled with the attention.”

Attention is not the only overwhelming factor of winning the SCHEV Outstanding Faculty Award — a lot of work goes into providing examples and resources for review. “The honor of being nominated comes with a lot of work,” says Koster. “You work with the president’s office putting together a package, so it’s quite a bit of work, actually. I found out a couple of weeks before the holiday, it was surprising— it’s a big honor,” she said. She continued with a chuckle, “A lot of people kept calling me tireless, and I was like— I’m very tired! It’s very tiring.”

Besides all the work of being nominated, Koster has also been kept busy with transitioning both her classes and the writing center online. “I had thought I would spend the summer doing creative writing. But with getting the Writing Center and also getting teaching completely online, it’s been very consuming,” Koster said. “I was kind of in the groove, and then [the pandemic] came along.”

Among all this work, Koster still finds the time to encourage her students to use their voices. She cites her upbringing as part of her inspiration: “My mother’s family is Mexican; Mexican families are very close. They’re very tight knit. We would spend a lot of time traveling to visit various family members, but I did not speak Spanish— I was not raised speaking Spanish, though my mother was raised bilingual. That was a challenge ... I couldn’t speak to my grandmother, who only spoke Spanish and who very much wanted to be a good grandmother. I was terrified of her most of my childhood because I couldn’t speak to her,” she said. “Language, family — that’s something that comes up in my writing a lot, I think it’s really just wanting people to be able to speak their experiences and— I hate to say it, it sounds a little hokey— but speak their truth, and be able to express themselves.”

To learn more about the 2021 SCHEV Outstanding Faculty Award, visit www.schev.edu.