

FACULTY HONORED FOR SERVICE-LEARNING DEDICATION

One of the cornerstones of the well-rounded education that Miami Dade College students receive is service learning, which has them engaging with the community as a means of reinforcing important classroom lessons. Many MDC instructors creatively incorporate service learning into their courses, and this fall seven faculty members were recognized with 2019 **Spirit of Service Learning Awards**.

Organized by the **Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of South Florida**, the **Miami-Dade Teacher of the Year Coalition** and the **Armando Alejandro Jr. Memorial Foundation**, the awards honor outstanding commitment to academic service learning in Miami-Dade County K-12 and higher education institutions.

Here's a brief rundown of the College's two first-place winners who each received \$300, Melissa Grossman and Thomas Uhle Jr., and five honorees who were awarded \$100 each:

Miriam Abety (Padrón Campus) requires service learning in

all her psychology and leadership courses. She uses project-based learning and focuses on global sustainability as well as important social/civic issues.

Hoa Burrows (Kendall Campus) is the coordinator of the campus' **IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance** program. Students enrolled in specific tax courses are trained to prepare individual tax returns. Roughly 30 to 40 of the students volunteer a total of 1,300-plus hours for the program each spring, resulting in an estimated 700 taxpayers benefitting from this free service.

Lourdes España (North Campus) reinforces math concepts and motivates students to gain leadership skills by requiring her honors math students to do a minimum of 15 service-learning hours as peer math tutors to other MDC students.

Melissa Grossman (Wolfson Campus) asks her Fundamentals of Communication students to break into groups, volunteer at a nonprofit organization, collect photos and video footage of their

experience and the issue of interest, then create a short, persuasive video to publish on YouTube. They also write a 1,200-word essay.

Yolanda Nitti (Medical Campus) helps her students explore how the practice of nursing can influence the health of the community by having them volunteer a minimum of 23 hours with agencies that provide health resources to underserved families.

Kay Rubin (North Campus) helps her Psychology of Personal Effectiveness students learn how they can take initiative and address social, community and environmental issues by having them be proactive and serve a nonprofit organization.

Thomas Uhle Jr. (Padrón Campus) requires his Introduction to Diversity students to complete 15 service-learning hours at a public Title 1 school serving students from low-income households, so they can experience the realities of teaching in South Florida.

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Top: Students from the Fundamentals of Communication class volunteering; Above: Melissa Grossman and Thomas Uhle Jr.

New MDC Faculty

Nursing Professor Champions Women's Health

Dr. Chinwe Ofoleta has traveled back to Nigeria, her birthplace, to research how infertility affects married women. Her interest came partially from personal experience with fertility issues.

"The outcome of my research was horrendous; nobody pays these women attention, nobody knows what they're going through," said Ofoleta, a nursing professor. To foster awareness, she supports nonprofit groups that work in the area of women's reproductive health globally.

Ofoleta attended Miami Dade College in 1991 after immigrating to the U.S. She recalled how supportive professors encouraged her to accomplish her dreams.

"I took a language and speech class, and the professor's kindness motivated me to improve my writing even when it was hard," said Ofoleta, who speaks four languages.



Dr. Chinwe Ofoleta

Also, MDC faculty "understood my diversity and helped me through difficulties with my accent," she said.

Ofoleta was a nurse and midwife in Nigeria. After attending MDC, she continued at Barry University, where she earned her bachelor's and Ph.D. in nursing.

She is an avid community organizer and has taught as an MDC adjunct and at other schools for over 13 years.

— RS

He's into Science — but Also Travel and Tree Houses

Dr. George Lotocki, who is in his first year as a full-time Miami Dade College physiology professor, has two decades of experience as a teacher, speaks five languages, and possesses a fascinating perspective on life cultivated during his world travels.

A native of the country of Georgia, Lotocki first came to the U.S. after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

He studied physiology and biophysics at the University of Miami and did postdoctoral work examining the molecular mechanisms of neurotrauma and strategies for therapeutic intervention.

He has published more than 25 peer-reviewed articles and presented his work during national and international conferences. He also served as a professor at varying levels.

While MDC students benefit from being in class with a profes-



Dr. George Lotocki

sor who brings a vast knowledge of basic sciences and clinical research, for Lotocki, it works the other way, too.

"I love the diversity and motivation of MDC students," Lotocki said. "They have helped me become a better educator."

These days, Lotocki is an avid ecotourist. Together with his family, he enjoys camping, star-watching and building tree houses.

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