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Miami Dade College honors seven professors for their teaching talents

By Christina Mayo
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DANIEL BOCK / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Ileana Porges-West, one of the Miami Dade College 2013 Endowed Teaching Chairs, at the Kendall Campus, Thursday, Aug. 22, 2013.

One of the most distinguished traditions at Miami Dade College marks its 21st year with the announcement of winners of its 2013 Endowed Teaching Chairs.

“Someone told me it’s like the Oscars,” said honoree Ileana Porges-West, who has taught at MDC since 2006.

Seven professors with stellar skills in music, mathematics, journalism, humanities, finance, and international relations will be recognized at a reception at 6 p.m. Monday at the Wolfson Campus’ Chapman Conference Center.

“MDC has always received a lot of recognition and accolades, locally and nationally. But the reason is our faculty, who are second to none,” said MDC President Dr. Eduardo J. Padrón. “They allow Miami Dade College to have such a positive national profile. And, this year’s honorees are the best of the best.”

Each year, a committee of their peers makes the selection of the new honorees. The winning professors are chosen for excellence in making student learning their top priority and for effective teaching strategies, professional growth, and student

retention and success.

The winning MDC professors are: Rosany Alvarez, the Northern Trust Bank of Florida Endowed Teaching Chair; Sarah Garman, the Dr. Stanley Sutnick Endowed Teaching Chair; Alina Coronel, the Charles A. and Carrie Mastronardi Endowed Teaching Chair; Billy Oliver, the Squire, Sanders & Dempsey Endowed Teaching Chair; Alex Gancedo, the

Honorable Jack Gordon Endowed Teaching Chair; Porges-West, the SunTrust Bank Endowed Teaching Chair in Banking and Finance; and Stephen Quinzi, The Frances Louise Wolfson Endowed Teaching Chair of Excellence in Arts.

Gancedo, who teaches social sciences at the MDC Hialeah Campus, has been a MDC professor for 22 years and is co-advisor to the college's National Model United Nations Team. He is proud that the 18-member MDC team finished in the top 10 percent at the April conference after competing against 350 teams from around the world. Gancedo has lectured at the Russian State Hydrometeorological Institute in St. Petersburg, Russia, and the Jagolonian University in Krakow, Poland.

He called the Endowed Teaching Chair program, and his honor, a unique opportunity.

"The award is your colleagues' stamp of approval that you have their respect, and that you're doing the right things for your students. It says that you're elevating your students to achieve at a higher level," Gancedo said.

Porges-West, also at the Hialeah campus, brought 25 years of business experience to her classroom. She said she gives that experience back to her students and likes to focus on civic engagement and service learning. She also draws on her background in anthropology, economics, ecology, business, literature and second language acquisition to teach English courses and classes in banking, business, economics, earth literacy and sustainability.

"It is wonderful to receive this award at this stage of my career. I had awards when I worked in business. I am very honored to achieve this from Miami Dade College," Porges-West said.

She said the college has many cultural activities that she includes in her teaching to give her students real world experiences.

"It prepares them for when they apply for scholarships, internships and careers," Porges-West said.

The other honorees also make it their missions to pioneer methods aimed at career success.

Alvarez has taught mathematics at the InterAmerican Campus for 22 years. She is involved in the Dual Language Honors Program and was recently a faculty advisor for the Salzburg Global Seminar, traveling to Salzburg, Austria, with 50 Honors College and Student Government Association students. To promote mathematics she has provided students with opportunities to meet professionals in the field to learn about career options.

Garman has followed in the footsteps of her parents, two former MDC professors. She joined the North Campus in 1994 and teaches developmental reading, writing and humanities. Her work in the Distance Education program of innovative approaches to teaching developmental education, and involvement in establishing the Center for Community Involvement have earned her multiple awards and recognitions.

Coronel has taught mathematics at the Kendall Campus for six years. She also served as chair of the Software Impact Committee and as a member of the Quality Enhancement

Plan Steering Committee for the accreditation of the college. And she worked on the Supplemental Instruction Committee. Coronel is the technology support person for the math faculty's online homework systems and has developed math courses for MDC's virtual college.

Oliver has taught for 22 years and has 10 years of broadcast experience. He teaches an electronic field production class at the North Campus in which students are required to write, shoot and edit a 13-minute documentary. Students can win awards at the end of the semester and many have gone on to successful careers at local TV stations and independent production companies. Oliver has been instrumental in revamping the Film and TV curriculum to meet changes in technology.

Quinzi, a composer, pianist, arranger and record producer, has had three commercial releases as a solo artist. Two albums featuring his arrangements have reached the top of the Billboard World Music charts. He has taught music and music industry at the Kendall Campus since 2005. He has also developed curriculum to include a series of popular songwriting courses. Outside class, he directs music at First Presbyterian Church of Miami Springs.

"This is a nice validation and recognition for our service and our devotion to our students," Quinzi said.

The MDC Foundation funds the Endowed Teaching Chair program and the honorees receive annual stipends. More than 300 recipients have been inducted since the program began in 1992.