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John Allen : Distinguished Achievement Award - Humanities

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2007 Distinguished Achievement Award - Humanities

John Allen '97

John Allen has distinguished himself, not only as a teacher and scholar, but also as someone who lives out much of what he imparts to his students in the classroom.

As a teacher at U.W. Milwaukee, U.W. Waukesha, Marquette University, and now at Milwaukee Area Technical College, John has taught a wide variety of writing and literature courses. His love of reading and literature probably began and was stimulated when his mother, who worked in the SNC library, regularly brought him to work where he explored the library's resources and read widely. He now credits his mother, Beverly, and these early experiences for instilling confidence in his research and writing abilities.

As a St. Norbert College student, and as an English and Communication major, John spent even more time in the library. He credits his teachers, especially Bob Boyer, Kyoko Mori, John Neary, and Steve Westergan, who offered him interesting classes, constructive advice and encouragement, and prompted him to pursue graduate studies that culminated in earning his Ph.D. in English (literary studies emphasis) from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2001. John gives special credit to John Neary for providing a model of the ideal English teacher.

But, there was another very important influence on John's career and life as an extension of his life in the classroom. Dr. Karina O'Malley, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at SNC, taught John "that you have to put your beliefs into action." In her classes, and by the example of her own life, O'Malley demonstrated to him "... the importance of putting social justice into practice." While he was a student at SNC, John was active in a group of students who worked with O'Malley to help found the very first homeless shelter in the Green Bay area, a shelter that was much needed and that led to the establishment of several other such shelters in the region.

Since then, John has been a frequent volunteer in homeless shelters. In the classroom, he tells his students how he "learned more about homelessness by working in shelters than I did by writing a book or reading hundreds of other books and articles on the subject." He also encourages his students to participate in service learning activities outside the classroom.

His students have commented that John's classes "have made them reconsider their opinion on ... complex social issues ..." Since graduation, he has taught, written, and lectured on literature and social justice in the context of homelessness, the death penalty, prison, gangs, immigration,

and hate crimes.

In 2004, John published his book, *Homelessness in American Literature: Romanticism, Realism and Testimony*. Subsequently, his book won the 2005 Faculty Research Award for the best research publication by a University of Wisconsin Colleges faculty member. At present, he is editing a collection of essays about Sr. Helen Prejean's *Dead Man Walking*. In addition, he has written articles and made over 20 presentations at regional and national conferences.

In sum, John's life and career are testimonies to his dedication to teaching literature and to social justice—interests that began and developed while he was a student at St. Norbert College.

St. Norbert College

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