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### John Koker : Distinguished Achievement in Education

St. Norbert College

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# 2014 Distinguished Achievement in Education



## John Koker '84

“The Math Whisperer,” one admiring colleague dubbed John Koker. Before taking his current position as dean of the College of Letters and Science at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, John was one of the most honored mathematics educators in the state.

His colleague’s colorful nickname highlights Dr. Koker’s unique ability to inspire and motivate his students, and to make the challenges of mathematics something to be relished, not dreaded.

He would lead his students through carefully constructed exercises to help them grow comfortable with the problem-solving process – challenging, questioning and encouraging them along the way. As

one colleague noted: “John socratically gifts students with the power of their own minds – a very empowering gift.”

It is a teaching approach that earned John the UW Oshkosh Distinguished Teaching Award, the UW Oshkosh Rosebush Professorship for excellence in teaching and research, and the UW System Board of Regents Teaching Excellence Award, given to only two educators in the entire UW system each year.

One former student (and current math teacher) said of his mentor: “John led me through an incredible adventure of becoming an independent, investigative and critical thinker. ... The

entire experience of John’s classes gave me a lasting knowledge and life skills on how to attack unfamiliar situations.”

The excellence that distinguished John in the classroom has been equally on display in his leadership roles. As chair of UW Oshkosh’s mathematics department, he spearheaded a major curricular overhaul of the general education mathematics requirement; as dean of the College of Letters and Science, he has been instrumental in the complete redevelopment and implementation of the university’s general education program, doing work his provost describes as “stellar.” He has served with distinction as both chair and governor of the Wisconsin Section of the Mathematics Association of America.

Though removed from day-to-day teaching, John continues to share his pedagogical gifts with others. He has generously conducted workshops for middle and high school teachers both in public and tribal schools, and each year he enthusiastically participates in the Pi Mu Epsilon math conference here at his alma mater.

For his deep commitment to the growth and development of the students and institutions he serves, we are pleased to honor John Koker with the Alumni Award for Distinguished Achievement in Education.

## St. Norbert College

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