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MSCC Instructor Earns National Excellence Award

Jeffrey Gray, a Contextualized English Specialist and Developmental Communications and Humanities Lead Instructor at Mid-South Community College, has earned a National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development Excellence Award.

“It’s quite an honor and certainly unexpected,” said Gray, a native of Harrisburg. “I was very shocked because I really wasn’t paying attention when they announced it. I looked up, and my picture was on the screen. I thought, ‘Oh no, what did I do?’”

“The honor is very meaningful because I work with some talented and committed people.”

Those who work closely with him recognize the same attributes in him.

“Mr. Gray is an instrumental team player towards institutionalizing the contextualized communication component of the Predominantly Black Institution grant,” said Paula Rose-Greer, PBI program director. “He is reflective and constantly revisits data drawn from his students’ success rate in preparation to enhance communication courses.”

“In promoting more effective advising practices, he partnered with Stephanie Krehl, Contextualized Math Specialist for PBI, to produce a placement guide for advisors to utilize during registration. This tool ensures that students are correctly placed in courses which impact their retention and overall academic achievement.”



Through his work with the PBI program, Gray works with STEM (science, technology, engineering and Math), Allied Health, and Teacher Education faculty to redesign courses to incorporate skills from developmental communications in program courses; collects and analyzes data related to contextualized instruction's effect on student retention and academic success; and compares success rates for courses with contextualized skills with rates for stand-alone skills courses.

"We are fortunate to have Jeff's talents at MSCC," said Dr. Cliff E. Jones, vice president for Learning and Instruction. "He is a quality instructor and dedicated lead faculty member. He understands the mission of the college and works to help his students achieve their goals."

Stephanie S. Eley, lead faculty for Communications & Fine Arts, described Gray is a "great asset" the College.

"Jeff is a very kind, patient teacher, and his students adore him. He's also a team player and is among the first to volunteer his time to assist with substitute teaching, planning, and other departmental duties."

Fellow instructor Michelle McMillen said Gray "really cares about our students and their education. He fights for policies and programs that will help retain and help students achieve their goals more quickly, and he takes extra time in advising them to find out how we can best serve their needs. Jeff is innovative and committed, and he continues to grow both as an instructor and team member."

Gray earned a master's degree in English and a bachelor's degree in Philosophy from Arkansas State University. He said his original career plans did not include teaching.

"I majored in Political Science and wanted to go to law school," he said. "I enjoyed it, but the more I learned about the legal profession, the less I felt it was me."

He enrolled in a Philosophy class and decided to pursue a double major. After completing the Philosophy requirements, he wasn't sure about his next move.

"I really enjoyed philosophy, but I didn't see a lot of career opportunities in it," Gray said. "I knew I loved to read, though, and when a graduate assistantship opened up in English Department, I decided to give English a try."

“I guess my becoming a teacher was inevitable. My mother was a teacher for 21 or 22 years at Harrisburg. I saw her pretty much every day at school, so I guess I really didn’t have choice. It’s in the genes.”

Gray’s father did some graduate assistant teaching in college, and his older brother is a teacher at Newport High School. His younger brother is associated with the University of Central Arkansas.

Gray started at MSCC as an adjunct faculty member in fall 2007 and became a full-time instructor in fall 2008.

“I enjoy working with students and being in a position to help them discover themselves, figure out what they want to do,” Gray said. “I like being able to share my joy of reading and communications with them while hopefully imparting that same feeling toward learning that I have.”

A tradition since 1989, the NISOD Excellence Awards program supports individual colleges in recognizing and celebrating their finest at home and on an international stage. Award winners exhibit a positive attitude; show commitment to student learning, student success through academic advising, and professional development; perform college service and contribute to institutional advancement; and demonstrate innovation, integrity, professionalism, and fairness

Previous MSCC faculty honorees include McMillen, Jason Carmichael, Jason Carr, Logan Oliver, Dr. Trenia Miles, Sanjay Chowdhury, Wilma Thomason, Dr. Topeka Small, Andrea Crutchfield, James Vardaman, Cynthia Armes, Tammy Hovland, Darrell Uselton, D. Steve Nichols, Barbara Simpson, Nancy Rieves, and Gale Allen.