

## **Lutes of Distinction**

Meet the Recipients of PLU's 2013-14 Distinguished Staff/Administrator Awards

By Sandy Deneau Dunham  
PLU Marketing & Communications

**TACOMA, Wash. (Dec. 9, 2014)**—On a campus filled with—and fueled by—inquiry, leadership, service and care, it's awfully challenging to uplift just a few particularly notable contributors. But each year, the Pacific Lutheran University community nominates, reviews and rewards outstanding Lutes through the Distinguished Staff/Administrator Awards.

Honorees are chosen for:

- support to the PLU community;
- consistently going above and beyond the call of duty;
- significantly enhancing the quality of the work and campus life for others in the PLU community; and
- being a well-respected and admired individual.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the three 2013-14 award winners, **Cynthia Givens**, **Tom Huelsbeck** and **Patricia Sunderland**, embody all of those qualities at once—and then some.

These profiles of their accomplishments and character—drawn from page after page of supportive nomination materials—are both inspiring ... and more than a little humbling:

### **Distinguished Staff Award: Cynthia Givens**

*Administrative Assistant for Humanities and Program Assistant for MFA*

Givens is a troubleshooter with a gift for shooting down trouble even before it happens.

She has worked with the Division of Humanities since 2011 and, according to Dean of Humanities James Albrecht, quickly became an indispensable member of the division.

“Cynthia is enormously capable and creative in handling any range of responsibilities in support of my work as dean, our four department chairs, the MFA program and the nearly 60 faculty working in our division,” Albrecht wrote in his nomination letter. “Cynthia has done especially outstanding work in the past several years in supporting some of our Humanities-sponsored and –supported events.”

And Givens' responsibilities in the Humanities Division are as wide-ranging, and as impactful, as those events: She compiles mailing lists, creates and distributes invitations and flyers, tallies RSVPs, schedules venues and catering, produces

program support materials and “stage manages” logistics—and surprises—for the Lutheran Studies Conference, David and Marilyn Knutson Lecture, and the Lutheran Studies/Wild Hope Center for Vocation lectureship, a triennial summer conference on Lutheran higher education and alumni gatherings.

“Cynthia has been outstanding at such work,” Albrecht said. “And as a result we have had well-attended and impressively run events—events where our guests from off-campus have actually complimented us on how well we do things here at PLU.”

As if her work in Humanities weren’t enough, in the last year, Givens has taken on additional duties as Program Assistant for PLU’s MFA program in Creative Writing, a “herculean effort” that involves a great deal of logistical support and intensive planning and coordination. And she’s been doing all of that work since summer 2014 on a two-person support staff instead of three.

“Cynthia meets all such challenges with an efficient, customer-service and detail-oriented focus,” Albrecht said. “Even more, she manages all the tasks we throw at her with a genial and even-keeled personality.”

Givens’ colleagues throughout the division echo that praise—along with amazement at her trouble-preventing skills.

Professor of New Testament Douglas Oakman has worked with Givens for two years on the Knutson Lecture and says, “It is almost as if before I even ask for help, she has already anticipated and taken action to meet some need.”

In her work with the Department of Religion, Givens handles printing requests, updates the department website, facilitates communication, books venues and oversees document deliveries across campus.

“I have collaborated with Cynthia on a variety of projects and can say in all honesty that none of them would have succeeded without her generosity, attention to detail and uncanny ability to foresee issues or problems that needed attention,” wrote Dr. Samuel Torvend, who holds the University Chair in Lutheran Studies. “I prize this in Cynthia: her keen ability to look ahead and think through challenges we could face before they materialize.”

“I have told her repeatedly that she can never leave PLU; her work is invaluable,” Torvend said. “We laugh about such a dopey statement, but I am also dead serious.”

### **Distinguished Administrator Award: Tom Huelsbeck**

*Associate Dean of Campus Life, Executive Director of Residential Life and Interim Director of Facilities*

With three demanding and disparate titles, Huelsbeck inspires admiration across campus—and one consistent question: How does he do it all *so well*?

Kat Slaby, resident director of Hong and Hinderlie halls, suspects a *Harry Potter*-like “time-changer.” Jes Takla, Director of Residential Programs, proposes a “super-human level of excellence.”

The reality might be that Huelsbeck is just living PLU’s mission through (multiple) opportunities to offer service, leadership and care.

“Tom provides for us all a model on how mission is translated to lived experiences, and he clearly serves the PLU community through that lens,” said Dr. Joanna Royce-Davis, Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students.

Dana McDonald, Residential Operations Coordinator, has worked with Huelsbeck for seven years and said she is still amazed by his ability to balance his role as a leader yet remain approachable and humble.

In his 20+ years at PLU, Huelsbeck has made consistent, outstanding contributions and connections across campus and beyond. He has, for example:

- developed and strengthened the partnership between academic programs and Residential Life through the Hong Hall language living-learning community;
- built a bridge between Facilities and Housing based on empathy, mutual understanding and communication;
- participated in a variety of campus committees, including search committees, always “willing to roll up his sleeves and do his share of the work”;
- implemented systems to improve students’ residential experiences;
- used Six Sigma/TOC training to accomplish improvements in Residential Life and Campus Safety;
- intentionally invested in the learning and professional development of young professionals through work and mentorship.

“Tom’s current title(s) ... demonstrate how integral he is to our community but fail to highlight all of his services and commitment to PLU,” McDonald said. “Yes, Tom has been in Residential Life longer than most of our students have been alive, but this ‘historical’ expertise is not the reason he’s committed to PLU. He is dynamic, authentic and respected by all who work with him. It’s his breadth of qualities that makes Tom the person you want on your team.”

Takla says despite the high level of his titles, “Tom is incredibly grounded ... and makes time not only for every professional staff member, but also to get to know and be involved in direct training for student staff and leaders.”

Takla said Huelsbeck holds brown-bag lunches once a month with Resident and Community Assistants to stay in touch and uses staff meetings to involve the entire team in goal-setting and strategic planning—and he values everyone’s perspective.

“He never ceases to amaze me with his endless patience and grace,” Takla wrote. “His competence is endless, and when I begin to feel that I have become fully aware of all his strengths, he undoubtedly impresses me with a new skill set, insight or innovation that is awe-inspiring.”

### **Distinguished Staff Award: Patricia Sunderland**

*Student Services Counselor*

PLU students count on their Student Services Counselors for one-on-one guidance through essential spheres such as the Office of Financial Aid, the Registrar’s Office and Student Accounts—and PLU counts on Sunderland to give her all to every student, every time.

“Patty has worked tirelessly making sure that her students and parents fully understand the many requirements of financial aid and student accounts,” wrote Ellen Hodge of Student Services. “Patty truly cares about her students and is always ready with a big smile and a willingness to serve. (She’s) well-known and –liked by her students, and she is very willing to listen and support them in every way that she can.”

Sunderland joined Student Services 14 years ago as a verification specialist and front-desk support staffer and quickly assumed more and more duties: processing student payment contracts, staffing the express counter and serving as a veterans-certifying official—all with energy, enthusiasm, patience and empathy. In addition to working with undergraduates, she also serves graduate students in PLU’s Master of Fine Arts and Masters in Family Therapy programs.

“Patty believes that all of our students, their families and her co-workers deserve the best and gives it each and every day,” wrote co-worker Lissa Hendrix. “Patty has always been willing to take on additional responsibilities above her regular job duties and has graciously served as our Emergency Building Coordinator for many years. She also took on the role of becoming a backup VA coordinator, which requires so much knowledge, it’s like having a second job!”

As a VA coordinator, Sunderland goes out of her way to help PLU’s expanding military population navigate the financial aspects of college and the maze of military benefits. One of the beneficiaries of her expertise is Michael Farnum, PLU’s Director of Military Outreach.

“Patty’s level of personal attention to me when I was a student at PLU from 2010 to 2013 was always first-rate,” Farnum wrote. “She was right there for me when I was struggling to understand the higher-education systems—now that I think about it,

she's always there for me when I ask about GI Bill benefits for the students that I am working with today."

"Patty consistently exemplifies personal attention to customer service, enhances the quality of work and campus life and inspires a commitment to duty that lends to PLU its reputation, a reputation for being a university that cares about the lives and success of each and every one of its students," Farnum wrote.

Farnum said Sunderland notices people and intuitively knows whether they are in need of a listening ear, a guiding hand or a piece of firm advice. And, when he worked at PLU as a VetCorps member, he noticed Sunderland was always one of the first people to come to work and often one of the last to leave. And it was *not* because of inefficiency.

"In the military, we call that devotion," Farnum said.