**Lutes of Distinction**

Meet the recipients of PLU’s 2016 Distinguished Staff Awards

**TACOMA, Wash. (Dec. 15, 2016) –** Pacific Lutheran University is a community dedicated to thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care. But the collective unit isn’t possible without many individual Lutes who embody those qualities in their daily lives. Each year, community members take a moment to honor those individuals who prop up the institution’s values. This year, four outstanding staff members garnered nominations from the fellow Lutes they’ve inspired, earning each of them a Distinguished Staff Award.

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

•      Being a well-respected and admired individual

The four 2016 award winners, **Carol Bautista, Steve Dickerson, Kelly Gaspar Poth and Luke Ruiz**, lead by example and model what it means to be a Lute in a community of care.

These profiles – compiled from many pages of nomination letters – show how their accomplishments and character continue to positively impact their peers and the community around them.

**Distinguished Staff Award: Carol Bautista**

*Faculty Governance Coordinator*

A long list of faculty members from across campus nominated Carol Bautista, many of them for the same reason: she does detail-oriented, thoughtful work that immensely benefits those around her. She’s regarded as the “backbone of the Faculty Governance system at PLU,” wrote Women’s and Gender Studies Chair Teresa Ciabattari.

Bautista is praised for her immaculate record-keeping, her ability to roll with the punches and her gracious attitude in the process. Her knowledge of university policies and procedures is invaluable, and her communication skills have improved the working environment for the committees she has served over the years.

“Carol finds meaning in her work and it shows in the care she takes in her duties,” wrote Michelle Ceynar, faculty vice chair and psychology professor. “She finds ways to make our jobs a little easier by anticipating our needs, prompting us with reminders of tasks that were done and making suggestions for improvements.”

Bautista handles delicate personnel matters with professionalism, respect for confidentiality and unruffled composure, says Joanna Gregson, professor of sociology and chair of the faculty.

“My experiences with Carol Bautista have shown me that she is an extraordinary communicator, exceptional administrative professional and valued colleague,” Gregson wrote. “She completes tasks accurately and efficiently, and does so in a way that leaves people with smiles on their faces.”

In addition to her exemplary work ethic, Bautista is “a joy to work with,” wrote Dean of Humanities Kevin O’Brien.

“I always light up when my phone rings and I see it is her or when she knocks on my door,” he wrote, “because I know that in addition to our work she will share an amusing story about her family, ask me about my life, and encourage me to take a vacation somewhere sunny.

“When I think of what I like about working with PLU, I think of my cheerful, helpful, hardworking colleagues,” O’Brien says. “Carol is at the top of that list.”

**Distinguished Staff Award: Steve Dickerson**

*Head Men’s Basketball Coach*

While everyone who nominated Steve Dickerson acknowledged his success coaching PLU men’s basketball, all primarily focused on his character beyond the court.

Dickerson is a grinder who approaches challenges with a fantastic work ethic and relentless attitude, says Athletic Director Laurie Turner.

“Steve has been a true asset to our program,” she wrote in her nomination. “He epitomizes the true meaning of a complete coach, possessing the understanding, integrity and vision to develop his student athletes much more than on the court.”

Dickerson’s passion and dedication has inspired student athletes, fellow coaches, colleagues, alumni and friends to strive for excellence in every aspect of life. His Real Life Wednesday program invites working professionals to share their experiences with current student athletes.

“He cares more about his players becoming quality human beings more than he cares about us becoming great basketball players,” says Erik Swartout, who nominated his coach on behalf of the men’s basketball team. “His main interest is helping us achieve our goals in the classroom so that we can become successful after we graduate.”

Dickerson retires in May after a 45-year coaching career, including 14 years at PLU. During his time here, he’s developed partnerships across campus and beyond. He’s created strong ties between the university and the Parkland-Spanaway community, offering free clinics for the Pierce County Recreation Department and the Tacoma Boys & Girls Club, as well as raising awareness for Make-A-Wish Foundation and the American Cancer Society.

Swartout says his coach leads by example, teaching his players about the importance of service to your community.

Dickerson also excels at fundraising, which has included spearheading locker room improvements for men’s and women’s basketball, as well as volleyball.

And, of course, he puts relationships with everyone in his extended community first, from student athletes and colleagues to parents and alumni.

“Following campus events or the result of a job well done, Steve spends time penning handwritten thank you notes, acknowledging the hard work and accomplishments of others,” says Associate Director of Athletics Jennifer Thomas.

Turner says these are some of the many ways that Dickerson is engaged with the entire campus community. “The world may need more PLU, but PLU needs more Steve,” she wrote.

**Distinguished Staff Award: Kelly Gaspar Poth**

*Assistant Registrar*

PLU Registrar Kevin Berg says Kelly Gaspar Poth regularly exceeds expectations and takes on duties far beyond her job description, while bringing a great attitude to her department.

She has played a key role in automating the verification process after the responsibility transferred to the department in 2015. The verifications have “become a near-daily part of Kelly’s job, but she continues to provide excellent customer service by returning completed verifications to students in a timely manner,” Berg wrote in his nomination.

When PLU became the records custodian for Trinity Lutheran College upon the end of instruction there, Poth quickly volunteered to help with the institution’s academic records. She’s worked through that project skillfully, planning for an effective transition.

“Because of her efforts, we have a well thought out plan and will be receiving the records in the coming weeks,” Berg wrote.

Also, after learning about required budget cuts here at PLU, Poth made a proactive effort to identify clever ways to save the university money, including cutting back on paper costs for transcripts. She found a more affordable vendor and led a design and revision process that resulted in significant financial improvements.

Last year, Poth also started serving on the Administrative/Staff Council to contribute to positive improvements to the work environment at PLU. “Kelly serves as an advocate for PLU staff and helps to shape the decisions that affect them,” Berg wrote.

While Berg says Poth has positively impacted the campus as a whole, she has also had a similar effect on her department. “She brings a dynamism to our group that contributes greatly to office relationships and co-worker interaction,” Berg wrote, noting that she brings the staff together in conversation, laughter and activity.

“For me, her ability to manage the office while I’m away and be a sounding board when I am here are a couple of the qualities that I value about her,” Berg wrote. “She’s deserving of recognition for all that she does for the Registrar’s Office and PLU.”

**Distinguished Staff Award:** Luke Ruiz

*Resident Director of South and Kreidler Halls*

Several nomination letters that include more than a half dozen voices show that Luke Ruiz is well respected by fellow Lutes for his work within Residential Life and across campus. Many of them acknowledge that it’s impossible to note all of his the ways he positively impacts the PLU community.

“What is amazing is Luke’s ability to focus on his excellent work in Residential Life, and still have time to effectively collaborate with multiple departments on campus,” wrote Tolu Taiwo, outreach and prevention coordinator for the Center for Gender Equity.

In his department, Ruiz is always intentional when considering the needs of all students he works with, specifically upperclass, transfer and commuter students. He fosters a sense of care through one-on-one conversations, and partners with faculty and staff members to create initiatives and workshops related to vocation, graduation planning and more.

“Luke is one of the best,” says colleague Dana McDonald, residential operations coordinator. “He’s always willing to go an extra mile for our students and maintains a positive can-do approach in the process.”

Ruiz also is a mentor for NASPA, a program for undergraduate students with marginalized identities who are interested in student affairs, as well as an advisor for Amigos Unidos, an affinity organization for students who identify as Latino/Latina/Latinx. He creates “a home away from home” for students of all backgrounds.

Ruiz also has been heavily involved with the Center for Gender Equity, currently serving as chair of the advisory board.

“I can confidently say that Luke has had a positive impact on both the students we serve, and our overall gender-based violence prevention efforts,” Taiwo wrote.

Thanks to his ability to innovate, Ruiz also created a Spanish-speaking session during New Student Orientation, to fulfill a need for families who don’t speak English as a primary language. “This session shows how Luke constantly sees a gap in our offerings and finds ways to collaborate in order to fill the gaps to support our community,” says Ian Jamieson, director of Student Involvement and Leadership.

Ruiz is praised by all his colleagues as a creative, passionate, selfless and detail-oriented leader. He has enhanced campus in a variety of ways, and will continue to do so.

“Luke’s ability to build community is perhaps a hallmark of his personality,” wrote Jennifer Smith, director of the Center for Gender Equity. “This note is far more brief than the true list of Luke’s merits.”