

The Faculty Excellence Award in Teaching recognizes a member of our faculty who embodies a commitment to excellence in their ability to communicate knowledge and inspire students. The 2018 Faculty Excellence Award in Teaching is presented to **Dr. Agnes Choi, Associate Professor of Religion**.

Professor Choi teaches New Testament, which was described by colleagues as being an inherently difficult subject for most students. As one colleague wrote, the study of religion can cause anxiety and stress for students before they even enter the classroom. The colleague observed that “Students can be defensive, fearful, or even resentful. For some, the texts will be profoundly sacred, for others they will be triggering. Each semester, Dr. Choi juggles a daunting array of abilities and personal commitments, navigating this minefield as she introduces students to the critical-historical study of the Bible and the history of the ancient world.”

Another colleague recalled asking Dr. Choi how she handles the very different ways students come into her classroom. Dr. Choi remarked that she responds to both kinds of students the same way: by earning their trust. When students trust her, they are open to learning what she has to teach and to forming a mutually-supportive classroom community. She works hard to be clear and consistent, to be honest with students about what they are expected to do and why, and to be explicit about the boundaries and power dynamics of her relationship with them as their professor. When students struggle, she doesn't lower her standards, but works harder to help and guide them. With her support, students rise to meet her high expectations. Her carefully crafted classes, exam review sessions, individual meetings to discuss papers, and detailed feedback provided on those papers are indicative of her incredible commitment to our students' success.

Students rave about the enthusiasm and energy Professor Choi brings to the classroom, on the intellectual challenges they find in her classroom, and the support she provides in order for them to meet her high academic standards. Professor Choi loves the study of ancient cultures and ancient languages, and she shares that love in an infectious way, inviting students to see why the subject matters and the joy they might take from in-depth and careful attention to it. A student observed that “Dr. Choi treated each section of the bible we read like a riddle, and I for one couldn't wait to figure out each piece and continue to cultivate my knowledge.”

Professor Choi has continued to develop as a teacher over her career, making changes to the content, approach, and structure of her classes each semester. She engages in deep conversations with colleagues about what works for them in the classroom, how to connect to PLU students, and how to simultaneously support and challenge them. She works closely with each semester's course evaluations, always dedicated to learning from her students.

One of her students wrote, “I can only hope to one day have as much passion about something as she does about teaching and researching religion”. For her excellence in practicing the craft of teaching, we offer our congratulations to Agnes Choi.