

The Faculty Excellence Award in Service recognizes a faculty member who demonstrates academic leadership and who influences the life of the university through service in areas of faculty governance, the university, and the community beyond the university. This year we honor **Dr. Neal Yakelis, Professor of Chemistry**.

A colleague who wrote in support of Dr. Yakelis's nomination noted, "I write this letter to recognize Neal Yakelis's career-long commitment to selflessly serving others. He has a kind heart and has taken on mountains of work so that this university might be a better place."

Dr. Yakelis's most visible and distinctive forms of service in recent years have taken place within the university's system of faculty governance. In just the past three years, he has served as Chair of the Chemistry Department, Director of the Wild Hope Center for Vocation, Vice-Chair of the Faculty, co-Chair of the Strategic Enrollment Management Advisory Committee, and Faculty Representative to the Board of Regents.

Prior to his leadership in these campus roles, Dr. Yakelis's most visible stint was on the ARTS committee, which he has served on twice. His second stint occurred at a time when the university began to recognize the importance of improving retention. With Neal as chair, the ARTS committee reviewed current PLU practices and policies with an eye for strategies that could increase student persistence. A colleague recalled that at one point, the committee was struggling to find a way to frame their work. Neal provide the breakthrough framework by suggesting the effort was "Solving the PLU Departure Puzzle", a play on the title of a book by renowned retention expert Vincent Tinto. This allowed the committee to think of the problem in small, discrete, digestible chunks and arrive at 16 'puzzle pieces' as a draft recommendation to improve retention at PLU. Additionally, Neal worked to ensure that some of the group's recommendations began to be implemented. He guided through policies making registration access codes mandatory for all students (a policy that continues today) and the replacement of paper midterm warnings with electronic 'progress alerts' (a predecessor of our current system). Many of the ideas and concepts that arose from those original 'puzzle pieces' carried over and became the basis for the final strategic retention plan authored by the committee and and completed in 2017.

Dr. Yakelis has also served on the Rank & Tenure Committee, the Wild Hope Steering Committee, Academic Assistance Center Advisory Board, PLU Areté Society, Bias Incident Response Team, and the Natural Science Division Academic Festival Planning Committee. He has offered faculty development workshops and workshops for pre-health science students, and he has served as Presidential Scholarship interviewer, among other roles on campus.

Beyond PLU, Dr. Yakelis's service to the profession of Chemistry has been sustained, praiseworthy, and even award-winning, particularly his service to the American Chemical Society's Puget Sound Section. The Puget Sound Section includes roughly 1800 members from western Washington, a portion of central Washington, and southern British Columbia. Neal served on the Puget Sound Section Executive Committee as Chair-elect, Chair, and Past-Chair. During his time as chair, Neal led monthly Executive Committee meetings, facilitated programming, budget deliberations, outreach activities, and other aspects of the section's

activities. While engaged in these elected positions on the Executive Committee Neal began his service on the Puget Sound Education Committee, a role he continues to date.

This citation would be incomplete if it did not mention the Chemistry demonstrations Dr. Yakelis has organized and performed twice a year since 2008. These events are one of the ways that the Chemistry Department shares their passion for science with members of the broader PLU community. Each show draws crowds of approximately 100 prospective students and their parents, as well as current PLU students. A colleague noted “You could literally charge money for admission (but we don’t) because Neal sets off a veritable light show of homemade giant light sticks and enormous fountains of glowing chemical reactions.” It’s impossible to say how many prospective students Neal’s demos have enticed to come to PLU and study Chemistry, how many parents think more highly of PLU because of his efforts, or how many current students gravitate towards the Chemistry Department because of him, although one colleague said “I personally subscribe to the notion that there is a ‘Yakelis Effect’ behind our department’s surge in majors.”

Neal’s service is effective in its clarity, reliability, and ability to draw people together, and it is marked by his genuine sincerity and concern for the university and all of the members of its community. Even with all that is demanded of him, he is not easily flustered, and he is gracious in thanking people for the work that they do. One colleague wrote that “Neal stands as a role model for all faculty who seek to engage fully with the university” while another noted, “Neal does not just serve with excellence, he serves with intention, heart, humor, and humility. He’s one of PLU’s best.”

For his record of service to the university and our community, we honor and thank Neal Yakelis.