

Three receive Outstanding Adviser Awards

By Meghan Cunningham : April 29th, 2010 UT News.

The University of Toledo recognized dedicated advisers Thursday with the Outstanding Adviser Award reception in Libbey Hall.

Receiving 2010 Outstanding Adviser Awards last week were, from left, Kathy Helmick, Wiona Altic Porath and Dr. Christina Fitzgerald.



The awards honor faculty and staff who exemplify excellence in academic advising.

The recipients of the Outstanding Adviser Award for 2010 are:

- **Dr. Christina Fitzgerald**, associate professor of English and the department's director of graduate studies. She is the academic adviser for the master's degree students in English literature. Fitzgerald, who joined UT in 2003, said all advisers have the goal to help students succeed. Her approach is to fully inform students about the master's program, ensure it coincides with their goals, and then create a flexible plan to help students achieve their goals while mastering the discipline. "I am something like an ambassador, but one that works in both directions," she said. "I represent the world of scholarship and professional activity to the students, initiating them into its practices, while I also help our faculty see what best meets the needs of our students while still presenting the best practices in our discipline." A nominator said Fitzgerald "exemplifies all that an adviser should be" because she is caring, knowledgeable and accessible. "Her interactions with her students radiate enthusiasm for the students, college and life in general," the nominator wrote. "I know she made the pursuit of my master's degree a positive experience, and she's a fundamental reason I'm able to work full time and get through this program." "It means a lot that they nominated me," Fitzgerald said. "Sometimes I can be kind of tough with them, and I hold them to high standards. I don't always know how that is being received, and this is great feedback."

- **Kathy Helmick**, a full-time academic adviser in the UT Learning Collaborative Gateway Programs. Helmick has been with the University since 1996 and said her background as a nontraditional student who later found a love of education has helped her relate to a number of students she works with. She also is an advocate for referring students to additional campus resources and keeping in touch with them over time. "I care that my students succeed," she said. "I know that all of them have different educational backgrounds, maturity levels, abilities, family support and desires for a certain career and life. Together, each student and I explore what it will take to reach the goal he or she is seeking." Helmick helped one nominator become a better student.

"When I first started at UT, I was not focused, but because Kathy instilled confidence in me and had faith in my abilities, I am now a much better student and am finally on my way to declare a major," the nominator wrote.

Helmick said she was so surprised when she found out she received the award that she didn't believe it.

"I was shocked and surprised, and I guess I didn't process it because I ended up e-mailing back to see if I had heard correctly," she said.

• **Wiona Altic Porath, academic program coordinator in the Department of Bioengineering.**

Porath, who joined the University in 2007, said academic advising is all about communication and it is important to stay current with trends like Facebook and texting to reach students. She said listening, genuine caring and a wealth of resources available allow her to help students discover themselves.

"Remaining objective and giving students the right tools at the right time is essential for guiding students," she said. "Often students already know the answer to what they are questioning. My position allows me to help them find that answer."

Her approach is not lost on her students, with one nominator writing, "Wiona is always helpful. She won't just do anything for you, but helps you do it. She helps you learn to make decisions yourself."

Another wrote, "The thing that sets her apart from most advisers is that she genuinely loves her students. Bioengineering would not be what it is without her."

As a nontraditional student going back to school for her bachelor's and master's degrees while raising three daughters, Porath said she saw firsthand the importance of good advisers, and she was inspired to help other students that way.

"I am very humbled by this award," said Porath, noting the other nominees and past recipients of the award. "I'm pleased my students think that much of me."