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Teodora (Teddy) O. Amoloza IWU's Top Teaching Award Earmarked for Sociologist

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—She grew up in a two-story wooden house in the Philippines—a house with a dirt floor and no electricity or indoor plumbing. Yet, she and her eight siblings all earned college diplomas, including doctorates and law degrees.

Now, Teodora (Teddy) O. Amoloza, associate professor of sociology and director of the international studies program, is poised to receive Illinois Wesleyan University's top teaching honor.

Honors Day Convocation

Amoloza will receive the DuPont Award for Teaching Excellence at an April 19 (Wednesday) Honors Day Convocation, which will convene at 11 a.m. in Westbrook Auditorium, Presser Hall (IWU's School of Music), 303 E. University St., Bloomington. The Convocation is open to the public, free-of-charge.

Several hundred IWU students—members of the class of 2000 and others who have earned scholastic and activity honors—will be recognized at the Honors Day Convocation. The 2001 recipient of the teaching excellence award also will be announced at the ceremony.

Amoloza, who joined the IWU faculty in 1990, will receive the \$1,000 teacher-scholar award, sponsored by DuPont Agricultural Products, Inc., of El Paso, Ill., a subsidiary of the Delaware-based chemical-industry leader, E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Co.

IWU's Promotion and Tenure Committee selects award recipients, based on their contributions to teaching, scholarship, and service.

Amoloza believes two key factors contribute to good teaching: a thorough knowledge of the subject matter and a genuine interest in students.

"You can have teachers who know much about the material they're teaching," Amoloza said, "but if they aren't interested in students they aren't good teachers."

Good teachers, according to Amoloza, also are good communicators. She confesses to constantly tinkering with finding better ways to communicate to her students, especially in an electronic age, when computers and the Internet present new challenges and opportunities to teachers and students.

Amoloza's Reaction

"It was unbelievable. I was totally, totally surprised," Amoloza recalled, referring to the announcement that she would be the teaching-award winner in 2000 at last year's Honors Day Convocation.

"My colleagues, who gave me this award," Amoloza said in a pre-Honors Day Convocation interview, "believed in what I do to help students learn. My colleagues also recognized my contributions to the university and the importance of the research I'm doing."

Amoloza, a sociologist who doubles as director of IWU's interdisciplinary international studies program, has been conducting research since 1993 on the role of women in international development. Her research is carried out in cooperation with the Philippines-based International Rice Research Institute, a non-profit agricultural research and training center established to improve the well-being of rice farmers and consumers, particularly those with low incomes.

Amoloza said her Honors Day address—entitled, "Tales from the Heart"—has a simple message for students and others: "Take the best advantage of the opportunities you are given. And, if you set your eyes on something that doesn't work out, you shouldn't despair—lick your wounds and go on."

Family Background

Amoloza's optimistic and determined outlook on life was forged in the poverty of her childhood—a childhood that was enriched by her father's savvy and commitment to education.

"We were dirt poor," Amoloza said, referring to her childhood. And, she means that literally. "The floor in our house wasn't concrete—it was dirt."

Amoloza's parents met at a World War II evacuation center at a time when Japan occupied the Philippines. Her father, Pedro Oliveros, was a skilled worker who did odd jobs often working with electrical contractors. He was also something of a philosopher, despite a sixth or seventh-grade education. Her mother, Rufina Oliveros, has a fourth-grade education. Over the years, Rufina took in the laundry of U.S. troops stationed in the Philippines to supplement family income, washing the G.I.'s clothing in a nearby river and pressing them. Rufina also helped her mother-in-law, who had a small business cooking rice delicacies for fiestas and other special events. Amoloza's father died last year at age 80 on his wife's 75th birthday.

Amoloza was born in 1951 in Tanauan, Batangas, Philippines, then a rural area about 40 miles south of Manila. Her early education included enrollment in Catholic and public elementary schools. She was valedictorian of her elementary-school graduating class, an achievement that won her a tuition scholarship for high school.

Childhood Poverty

The poverty of Amoloza's childhood is reflected in the fact that her schools lacked textbooks. "Every once in a while," she remembered, "there were books we had to buy in a bookstore. This was a big-ticket expense for my parents."

When my father bought the books, I read them cover-to-cover—and I almost memorized them. Social-studies books fascinated me."

As a youngster, Amoloza also regularly visited the local library, where she took out books filled with Philippine stories and folk tales.

Amoloza recalls other telltale signs of the poverty of her youth:

- o Her eldest brother, Jose, would leave the house and go down to a street corner, where he would study under the streetlight.

- o A dip in the street outside of the Oliveros home periodically was filled with rainwater, forcing her father to shovel and pack dirt around the house to prevent flooding. However, sometimes water seeped into the house, forcing the Oliveros youngsters upstairs to eat meals--meals prepared in the first-floor kitchen, where, she recalled, "my parents were cooking knee deep in water."

- o All the children slept on the floor, radiating out in a row from their parents in order of seniority.

- o As a high-school student, Amoloza's brother, Jose, earned money by peddling breakfast buns he bought on consignment from a local bakery. He did this chore for two years, requiring him to get up at 4 a.m.

Amoloza attended Tanauan Institute, a private high school of 1,200-1,400 students, where she was class valedictorian and cultivated an interest in history, social studies, algebra, and geometry.

The \$1,000 DuPont Award for Teaching Excellence that Amoloza will receive April 19 is earmarked for the Pedro Oliveros Memorial Scholarship at the Tanauan Institute, a school from which all of Amoloza's siblings were graduated. The scholarship will be inaugurated in June, the start of the academic year in the Philippines.

High-School Exchange Student in the United States

After she completed high school in the Philippines, Amoloza was an exchange student in Newington, Conn., for a year. Her hometown's Rotary Club helped cover the expenses for her trip to the United States, sponsored by the American Field Service.

"When I was in the Philippines," Amoloza said, "I had heard about problems of discrimination in the United States. I was the only colored person in the Newington high school. But my foster family was great. They also volunteered to host students in their home from the University of Connecticut—students who came from Kenya and Nigeria. I really admired that."

Off to College

Amoloza enrolled in the College of Agriculture at the University of the Philippines in Los Banos, where she majored in statistics and received a scholarship. However, Amoloza lost the scholarship when she failed a swimming class, forcing her to work as a student assistant in the chemistry department. Later, she received a larger scholarship, which, Amoloza said, was "real money that I gave to my parents."

School was tough, especially since Amoloza again faced a textbook shortage. Consequently, she said, "We were dependent on professors' lectures and had to be good at taking notes. We had to hand write everything. There were no copying machines or typewriters."

But, college also was fun for Amoloza because she was away from home, meeting new people and learning to live on her own. However, this was the era of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when student activism worldwide was on the upswing and Amoloza became something of a rabble-rouser.

"It started," she explained, "with local issues like wanting better instruction. But, later we became concerned with nationalistic issues—the feudal system of land-holding in the Philippines, the increased militarism of the armed forces and local police—the fascist type of state under Marcos—and American imperialism in Vietnam. We questioned why we were sending a Philippine contingent to Vietnam." Ferdinand Marcos (1917-89) ruled the Philippines from 1965-86, when he was toppled from power after years of repression, misuse of foreign financial aid, and political murders.

Amoloza was graduated from college in 1971, completing a 5-year-program in just over 4 years. She worked as a research assistant at the International Rice Research Institute for 14 months before joining the University of the Philippines as a graduate assistant, while working on a master's degree in statistics, which she completed in 1976.

Family Life, Moving to the U.S.

Amoloza married her husband, Jerry, in 1975, a scant 11 days before he left for Australia to work on a master's degree. She joined him there in 1977. They returned to the Philippines in 1979, the year their daughter, Jaydee, was born. Amoloza taught statistics at the University of the Philippines from 1979-82, when she enrolled at Oklahoma State University to do graduate work in sociology.

"I started to feel that doing data analysis was so cold," Amoloza said, explaining her urge to switch fields. "I started looking around for a field where I could use my statistical training and incorporate the human perspective."

Amoloza transferred to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln a year later, when her husband began his studies at that campus. She received a doctorate in sociology in 1988.

While at Nebraska, Amoloza worked on a research project probing divorce, remarriage, the impact on children, and the American family. The study examined factors that determine marital happiness and stability.

Sociology, International Studies

This semester Amoloza is teaching an introductory course in international studies and a senior seminar in sociology. Next month, she will lead a travel course to Southeast Asia, where her students will study the culture and societies of Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Doran French, professor and chair of psychology, also will lead the trip.

Amoloza's personal experiences in international education spurred her interest in the field. "I want to convey to students," she explained, "excitement about the world." She has headed IWU's international studies program since 1993.

"A number of IWU faculty," she said, "are passionate about international studies. They develop courses, they invite guest speakers to campus, and they organize panel discussions.

"IWU's international studies program," Amoloza added, "is very interdisciplinary, which is a major strength."

The program has a half-dozen areas of concentration, and students take courses in the humanities, fine arts, social science, health, business, and economics. Students involved in area-studies programs also have a foreign-language requirement.

Education as a Route Out of Poverty

Amoloza and her siblings took their father's philosophy—poverty is no hindrance to success—to heart. She pitched in to help a sister and two brothers through college, while other siblings helped the remainder of the family through school.

"Our parents," Amoloza said, "gave us moral support and in terms of financial support, siblings helped siblings."

The Amoloza children—who are 21 years apart, youngest to oldest—over the years have helped their parents financially, especially when their parents have faced surgery and hospitalization.

Amoloza said her father was a firm believer in giving moral support to family members.

"He always demonstrated it," she said. "My brother took the bar exam on four consecutive Sundays. My mother and several of my siblings took a bus at 4 a.m. to be at the place where he was taking the test just to say, 'Good luck.' And, they stayed for four hours, waiting to take him to lunch and say, 'Good luck,' before the afternoon exam—that's moral support."

Amoloza recalled that when she took her "orals" as part of the requirements for her master's degree, her father was standing at the bottom of the stairs when she came out of the exam to take her to lunch.

Amoloza's husband, Jerry, is a graduate student working on a doctorate in economics at Northern Illinois University. Their daughter, Jaydee, will graduate from Washington University in St. Louis with two bachelor's degree: a bachelor of science degree in computer science and a bachelor of arts degree in psychology.

About IWU

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,070 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. A \$23 million library and a \$6 million student center are under construction.

Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine ranks Illinois Wesleyan University 12th among the nation's top 1,600 private colleges in providing a top-quality education at an affordable cost. Also sharing IWU's rank are Princeton and Dartmouth.