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## Kathleen O'Gorman IWU English Prof Wins DuPont Teaching Excellence Award

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Kathleen O'Gorman

## **IWU English Prof Wins DuPont Teaching Excellence Award**

*Locals  
Education  
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Composite*

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Kathleen O'Gorman, associate professor of English, will receive the 1996 DuPont Award for Teaching Excellence, Illinois Wesleyan University's top teaching honor, at the annual Honors Day Convocation, April 24 (Wednesday).

The \$1,000 teacher-scholar award--which will be presented to O'Gorman at an 11 a.m. university-wide convocation--is 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. Robalee M. Deike, human resources manager of DuPont Agricultural Products, will make the award presentation.

"It's a daunting and humbling experience to win the DuPont Award for Teaching Excellence," O'Gorman said. "When I learned that I had won it [at last year's Honors Day Convocation], I instantly thought of all the others who should have received it."

The Honors Day Convocation, which is open to the public, free-of-charge, will be held in Westbrook Auditorium, Presser Hall, 303 E. University St., Bloomington.

The 1997 recipient of the teaching award will be announced at the Honors Day Convocation.

James Matthews, associate professor of French and chairperson of IWU's foreign language department, received the 1995 DuPont teaching award.

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

### **O'Gorman's Speech**

O'Gorman's address, "As if the language suddenly, with ease . . .," will focus on her classes and her students, especially their intellectual passions and willingness to take intellectual risks.

O'Gorman believes students should study English for the same reasons they study physics, biology, art, history--and all the other areas of intellectual inquiry--to learn to appreciate, as well as to call into question, the many different kinds of constructs we use to define our world.

"Students should study English," O'Gorman said, "so they won't be victims of every bumper sticker and slogan that comes a long. By studying English, students can develop a healthy suspicion of language and how language can be used to manipulate them, as well as appreciate its beauty, its seduction."

### **O'Gorman Profiled**

O'Gorman grew up in Scranton, Pa., in a family with seven children. Her father, Frank, was a college teacher, probation officer, U.S. Interior Department public relations specialist, and for 20 years served as a Capitol Hill aide to U.S. Rep. Joseph McDade (R-Pa.), longtime ranking GOP member on the House Appropriations Committee. In addition to raising seven children, her mother, Elizabeth, was a secretary at Marywood College in Scranton, where O'Gorman earned a bachelor and master's degrees in English.

O'Gorman's fascination with English and literature began as a child, growing up in a home filled with books. Her father at one time taught English at the university level and enjoyed memorizing and reciting poetry.

"He loved poetry--it was in his blood," O'Gorman said of her father. "And, it's in my blood, too."

However, O'Gorman said, her father did not influence her career decision.

"I was sitting on the porch of our house, the summer after my senior year of college," she recalled. "My mother asked me, 'What do you want to do next?' assuming I had the education and the skills. I told her, 'I want to teach English at a college.'"

O'Gorman was inspired to become an English professor by the teachers she had as an undergraduate at Marywood College, a women's liberal arts campus in her hometown.

"My professors at Marywood," she said, "made teaching look like fun. They had a passion for their work."

O'Gorman's teachers and role models shared a love of language, a humanizing sense of humor, a cynicism that she found appealing, and a willingness to venture beyond safe and standard interpretations of literature.

O'Gorman, who joined the IWU faculty in 1986, teaches courses in 20th-century British and Irish literature, experimental literature, avante garde fiction, and drama.

Referring to drama, O'Gorman said: "I love factoring in a constellation of issues with performance, rather than simply the printed word."

She counts among her literary heroes Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Luisa Valenzuela, Jorge Luis Borges, Marguerite Duras, Adrienne Kennedy, and Samuel Beckett.

"In different ways," O'Gorman said of her literary heroes, "they all push the boundaries of what language can do, drawing attention to its limitations. These writers, on the one hand, demonstrate the beauties of language, so that it works like a siren song, and, at the same time, they show the limits of language."

After 20 years in the classroom, O'Gorman has come to some conclusions about what it takes to be a good teacher.

Skepticism about oneself and others, according to O'Gorman, is a key ingredient of good teaching.

"Probably the greatest danger [to good teaching]," O'Gorman said, "is to take yourself too seriously. Teaching for me is a kind of endless engagement with questions."

O'Gorman has edited a collection of essays on the 20th-century British poet Charles Tomlinson, the subject of her doctoral dissertation. "Charles Tomlinson: Man and Artist," published in 1988 by the University of Missouri Press, is the first book-length study of Tomlinson.

O'Gorman is working on a book about Irish writer Samuel Beckett, winner of the 1969 Nobel Prize for Literature, entitled, "Hers Presumably:" Mediations of Desire in Samuel Beckett's Dramas of Women.

O'Gorman earned a bachelor of arts degree in English in 1973 and a master's degree in English in 1975 from Marywood College. She received a doctorate in English from the University of Notre Dame in 1981.

She served as full-time academic advisor to Notre Dame freshmen from 1981-84, spending a semester in 1984 with Notre Dame's London-based program. O'Gorman was a visiting assistant professor at Notre Dame for 18 months before joining the IWU faculty.

#### **Honors Day**

Several hundred IWU students--members of the class of 1996 and others who have earned scholastic and activity honors--will be recognized at the Honors Day Convocation.

More than 20 students will receive Outstanding Senior awards.

Students will be recognized for membership in about 15 honor societies in disciplines ranging from sociology and marketing to nursing and political science. Inductees into Phi Kappa Phi, the national scholastic honorary society for juniors and seniors, will be recognized.

Students who have been awarded about 17 named scholarships--such as the Edward B. Rust Fellow and the Minority Alumni Network Award--will be recognized.

The School of Fine Arts will recognize student accomplishments in performance, production, art, and other fields.

Other awards will be made to students in nursing, poetry, international affairs, business insurance, and science.

Students who have distinguished themselves in student government, media, and special events also will be honored.

Men and women varsity athletes also will be recognized.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,850 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$25 million science building opened in the fall of 1995. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a

"Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 161 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition. --30--