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The Students' Choice **Paulette Stenzel**

Professor Paulette Stenzel, a specialist in international business law from the Department of Finance, has been selected as this year's recipient of the Honors College Award for Distinguished Contributions to Honors Students. Professor Stenzel was nominated for the Award by two of her Honors College students—**Cliff Bracey**, an accounting senior, and **Kelly Averbek**, a general business administration-pre-law junior.

This Award was established in cooperation with the Honors College Student Advisory Committee and the Alumni Association to recognize exceptional contributions to Honors College students through teaching, advising, or mentoring. The Award is presented once each year during the spring semester, and this is the fifth year the Award was offered.

Paulette Stenzel is professor of international business law in the Eli Broad College of Business. Professor Stenzel also serves as an Honors College adviser, as a mentor to Professorial Assistants, and as originator and Director of the Honors Business Study Abroad Program in Mérida, Mexico.

For more than 20 years, Professor Stenzel has been an acclaimed teacher of honors business law classes, a dedicated adviser and mentor of honors students, a strong advocate for the value of international study, and a key supporter of the Honors College at MSU. The many students and colleagues who joined Cliff and Kelly in supporting this nomination note that they have been both challenged and inspired by her classes and mentoring. As one colleague put it, "she is a dedicated teacher whose courses

are demanding, comprehensive and interesting." A number of former students note her "passion for teaching." Many students recognize the study abroad program she has organized as a "life-changing experience." Her students uniformly praise her devotion to each individual student's development in her role as teacher and adviser, as well as her role as a supportive, encouraging, and lasting mentor to many.

"We are very pleased to recognize a faculty member who has been a dedicated and appreciated Honors teacher and mentor at Michigan State," noted Ronald Fisher, Director of the Honors College. "It was clear to the selection committee that Professor



Professor Paulette Stenzel

Stenzel has nourished a special relationship with a wide variety of Honors students, and in so doing has enriched their lives and the educational environment at MSU."

The Award was presented at the annual University Undergraduate Scholarship Dinner. In addition to a certificate, the Award recipient receives an honorarium of \$1,000. All of the recipients of this Award are identified on a permanent display located at the Honors College.

*2003 Honors College Award Recipient
for Distinguished Contributions
to Honors Students*

Paulette Stenzel

TH STUDENTS

The Spider Web

My Life Teaching Honors College Students

By Professor Paulette Stenzel

Teaching and learning are two of my greatest passions in life, and my work with Honors College students allows me to share those passions with kindred spirits. I tell my students in my Honors Business Program in Mérida, Mexico, that we “work hard and play hard.” I mean it. I want to enjoy my work with my students, but the avenue to that enjoyment is one of serious academic pursuit. I set high standards for my students because I do not believe they should settle for less. My classes and my efforts are directed toward helping them meet those standards. The Award for Distinguished Contributions to Honors Students is coordinated by students and alumnae of the Honors College. Therefore, receiving the award is a thrill for me; it provides wonderful reassurance that my efforts are valued and result in tangible benefits to my students. In this essay, I will reflect on my teaching and my interactions with Honors College students. In short, this reflection reaffirms that my life has evolved into a spider web of interconnected teaching, learning, and personal relationships. I am involved with Honors College students nearly every day of my life.

I teach because I love to learn. I enjoy teaching Honors College students in particular because, on the whole, they value learning. Thus, they understand why I require learning activities that call for discussion, thinking, exploration, and synthesis. No matter how many academicians tell me that multiple choice exams can be designed to test learning in a meaningful way, I avoid them whenever possible. Instead, I require essay exams, research papers, class presentations, and discussion of current events. Most of my students appreciate the feedback they get on their work. Additionally, most of my Honors College students are open to an integrated approach to subject matter. For example, when I teach “Doing Business in Mexico” each summer, we learn about Mexican history, politics, art, economics, and law in addition to the expected business topics.

The Mexico program also reflects an integration of my life experiences. My undergraduate majors were French, Spanish, and Secondary Education. My professional research is in international environmental law, much of which focuses on the environment of Mexico and the United States. Teaching in the Mexico program allows me to share my interests and expertise, continue to learn, and show students that learning cannot be about one subject in isolation from others. Additionally, the Mexico program allows students to see me as a human being. During my interactions with students on campus, I talk about my two children. They are a major part of my life. On site in Mexico, my family joins me. Students learn that I am a whole person: Mom, teacher, learner, wife, violinist, reader, and other things.

A spider web serves as an apt metaphor for my work with Honors College students. The Mexico program is one strand in that web. I advise Honors College Students majoring in Business Pre-Law. During advising appointments, I ask each student about his or her plans for study abroad programs including, but not limited to, the Mérida Honors Program. I teach GBL 395 Honors—Business, Law, and Public Policy. GBL 395 is a required course for most Broad College majors, but my GBL 395 Honors course includes students from various MSU colleges. Students from diverse backgrounds enrich our discussions every day. After students take GBL 395 Honors, they often enroll in one of the two other courses I teach on campus. One is GBL 420—The Role of Law and Lawyers in Society; it is our pre-law capstone course. The other course is GBL 460—International Business Law. I usually have a substantial percentage of Honors College students in both courses, most of whom have already taken one or more courses with me. This enriches the classroom environment for all of us. The entire class is

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exposed to students who are accustomed to learning in-depth, not just learning enough to take a multiple choice test. They see that my expectations are not impossible to meet. Thus, many members of my International Business Law class end up acting and looking like Honors students. Moreover, discussions carry over from one course to the next. For example, in the International Business Law course, I use Mexico as one of my focus countries. (The other is Romania.) Students who have studied in Mexico are able to bring first-hand observation to the classroom. They help me work toward my goal in each classroom: a community of learners. As teacher, I cannot know everything. Rather, my goal is to be a facilitator. Therefore, the knowledge and viewpoints of my students are integral to development of that community.

My professional service is another strand in the web. In 1997, I proposed that our Tri-State Academy of Legal Studies in Business (Tri-State ALSB) start a paper competition for students. (As a proponent, I ended up being the administrator for the competition. I continue to administer it each year.) Winners present their papers at our annual meetings and their papers are published in our proceedings. Shortly after the Tri-State Competition began, the International ALSB started a similar competition modeled on it. Therefore, I offer students in my 400-level classes the opportunity to do Honors Options research papers that must meet the criteria for submission to one of the competitions. I provide feedback on each student's final paper, and I encourage the student to revise it and submit it for the competition. Those who have chosen to do so have been highly successful. Out of thirteen winners over six years



Professor Stenzel with Honors Business students at Uxmal in the Yucatán of Mexico.

Honors Web

at the Tri-State competitions, six have been my students. No other school in the Tri-State (encompassing all business law colleges in Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Ontario) has won as many! Additionally, for the first time, in 2002 one of my students entered the International ALSB competition, and she was one of the eight winners. In short, my Honors College students learn how to do legal research and write excellent papers. They prove themselves beyond the classroom, and I am proud of them for doing so.

In the midst the many activities I have mentioned, my life and the lives of my children and husband intertwine those of my students. We get to know each other relatively well on campus; we get to know each other extremely well in Mexico. We share two weeks of meals, bus trips, lectures, and discussions. We climb pyramids, endure 105° F heat and rain showers in the Yucatán, learn to catch shrimp in a net at PECIS (a seafood harvesting and distribution company), and ride on “trici-taxis” (tricycle taxis used in villages of the Yucatán). Our interactions and shared experiences lead to long-lasting bonds. I hold a reunion each fall at my home with my students from that summer’s Mérida group; I wish I had time to do it each year for each of my past groups.

How did I get to this point? I earned my B.A. at Albion College, a small liberal arts undergraduate institution. My classes were small: lower-level classes seldom exceeded twenty students and in many of my upper-level classes there were only five to eight people. I took essay tests, did research, and wrote papers in a substantial number of my classes. I studied in Morelia, Mexico. First, I went after my freshman year as a student. During the following summers I was a Program

Assistant in Morelia. I also studied during my sophomore year in Bogotá, Colombia. During my years at Albion, I was invited into my professors’ homes; I remain in contact with them today. I am grateful for those experiences, and I know that they helped me develop as a learner and helped me on my path to becoming a professor.

It is with some amazement that I reflect upon my connections with my Honors College students. At this point in my career, I believe that my work with them has resulted in “a little corner” at MSU where my students and I share many the same kinds of experiences I had at Albion. (I am sure, of course, that there are many other similar “corners” of learning and relationships at MSU.) My research in international environmental law could appear to students to be relatively narrow. Nevertheless, I am able to take a broad-based approach to learning. I teach courses that allow an integration of business, law, environmental protection, science, history, politics, and current events. Moreover, I have a practical, every day use for my Spanish as I coordinate our Mexico program. I am constantly telling my students they need to learn another language, and my experiences allow me to provide a model for use of language.

Because we live in an age of globalization, all of our students need a broad-based approach to learning. They need to know about many types of thinking, points of view, and ways of living. Such exploration suits me well. I love to learn about many different subjects, and teaching gives me reason to do that every day of my life. Thus, through my work with Honors College students, at least two of my passions are fed: teaching and learning.

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