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Enthuse, Engage, Enable

Journalism Professor Dan Hollis is recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

by Katherine Pyles

Seeing a long line of students near a professor's office is rarely a good sign. It could mean a recently released batch of failing grades or a series of pleas for deadline extensions - or a "misunderstanding" regarding the class attendance policy.

But if you notice students congregated outside the office of Dan Hollis, it can only mean one thing: there is just not enough room inside.

Dan Hollis, associate professor and interim assistant dean of the W. Page Pitt School of Journalism & Mass Communications, is known for a lot of things, including a high-energy teaching style, an insuppressible passion for journalism and a well-stocked supply of Starbursts. But it is his dedication to students - both in and out of the classroom - that maintains his overflowing office.

That same dedication has earned him numerous awards since joining the School of Journalism faculty in 1999. Most recently, he was named the 2012 West Virginia Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a presti-



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gious honor bestowed during a November 15 ceremony in Washington, D.C. Previous West Virginia Professors of the Year winners from Marshall are mathematics professor Dr. Karen Mitchell in 1995, English professor Dr. John McKernan in 2000 and psychology professor Dr. Steven Mewaldt in 2003.

"I am in a great and unique situation in life," Hollis said. "I get to inspire and be inspired by college students all day on a beautiful campus. There's this great sense of reward knowing you've played a role in helping students reach their potential and dreams. To receive any kind of outside recognition for something that I already receive so much from is icing on the cake."

2012 was a busy year for Hollis. When former School of Journalism dean Dr. Corley Denison was appointed associate vice president for academic affairs and dean of undergraduate studies in July, assistant dean Janet Dooley assumed the interim dean position and Hollis was named interim assistant dean. Even with additional administrative responsibilities, Hollis remains committed to his calling.

"Teaching is my thing," he said. "It's what I do. It's who I am."

For Hollis, teaching means much more than standing in front of a classroom each day. Even in the classroom, moments of standing still are few and far between. Shouting, jumping and friendly name-calling are all standard practice in his classes, which include the school's introductory journalism course, courses on mass communications law and

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information gathering and various special topics courses for both undergraduate and graduate students.

Hollis has an "upbeat, animated, personal approach to teaching," wrote former student Paul Gessler, reporter with WBFF Fox45 Baltimore and 2012 Edward R. Murrow Award winner, in a nomination letter for the Carnegie Foundation award. "Often times during class, passing students would peer into Hollis' class, inevitably to answer their internal dialogue, 'Who is that guy, and why is he walking on chairs?' His name is Dan Hollis. And no one's quite sure why he does that."

Gessler, who graduated in 2007 with a degree in broadcast journalism, said Hollis's practical knowledge, with more than 20 years of journalism experience, commands respect. The profound impact Hollis had on him during his freshman year of college has evolved into a lifelong friendship.

"I've never needed him for something and not been able to get ahold of him," Gessler said. "He is still the same person who taught me as a freshman, except now my daily office visits have turned into daily phone calls."

Cathleen Moxley, a 2008 graduate who is a reporter and Saturday morning anchor for WSAZ in Huntington, echoed Gessler's sentiments.

"You go into his early morning class as a freshman, and all you want to do is lay your head on the desk - but a minute in, you realize that's not going to happen," she said. "Suddenly you're awake and you don't even feel like you're in class anymore."

Moxley said Hollis is set apart by his genuine care for students, even beyond graduation.

"I still ask him for career advice, and I probably always will," she said.

The classroom antics that attract students and occasional passersby to Hollis's classroom are a purposeful aspect of his teaching philosophy, summed up in three words: "Enthuse. Engage. Enable." Making sure his students are committed and focused in the classroom, excited about learning in general and equipped for their future careers is a talent that comes naturally for Hollis.

"Dan Hollis has been recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for the superb way he engages students in the classroom," said Dr. Gayle Ormiston, Marshall University's provost and senior vice president for academic affairs. "He makes sure students understand the material from a very practiced point of view, and he's a dynamic individual. He's very active and wants the students to be active participants in the classroom as well."

Outside of his teaching career, Hollis continues to practice journalism. His creative video work has earned him a Telly Award, Communicator Awards, the AVA Award and a Videographer Award, as well as the National Broadcasting Society's First Place for Video News six years in a row. His news stories are often posted on Marshall's YouTube channel.

"I love the creative work I do and finding ways to incorporate it into the classroom," Hollis said. "One of my fondest memories was working here on a Sunday on one of my TV stories. I wrote something and thought, 'Man, this is really good!' There were some students down the hall working on The Parthenon, and I called them in and said, 'Hey, listen to this!' They saw me being excited when I wrote something that I liked. I hope that translates to students – when you nail something, it's okay to be excited about it."

When asked about his recent accolade, Hollis is quick to praise his colleagues, noting that excellence in teaching is a long-standing tradition in the School of Journalism.

"The fact that our school is named after W. Page Pitt, a professor, shows how much we have always valued teaching," Hollis said. "That legacy continued with two legendary professors who were still here when I started, Dr. Arnold and Dr. Turner, both of whom had enormous influence on me. And I'm today surrounded by colleagues who are dedicated to making a Marshall School of Journalism and Mass Communications degree something to be very proud of. The honor of this award is in representing them." □

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