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Professor of the Year Ted Tsukahara: Serving the Common Good

Linda Lenhoff

Always humble and quietly charming, Integral Tutor Ted Tsukahara '62, AFSC, PhD, has been named Saint Mary's Professor of the Year for his invaluable service to the College for almost 30 years. Thank goodness he found the Integral Program when he did: Retirement may call to him someday, but thankfully, Professor Tsukahara is as dedicated to Saint Mary's as a person can be.

He approaches the award with his typical warmth and sense of humor. "When I heard about [the award], I thought it was somebody's campaign to



encourage me to retire because I guess by my calculation, I may be either the oldest full-time faculty member or certainly close to it on campus, and I could have retired years ago, but I didn't. So it may be that people were saying, "You might want to think about retiring," he joked. "But it came as a genuine surprise at this point. I'll be 81 this year. And my class is having its 60th reunion this summer."

Ted joined the Saint Mary's faculty in 1992, after earning his PhD from the Claremont Graduate University in 1970, teaching at Pomona College, then conducting a successful business career. Initially a professor of Graduate Business, he volunteered to become an Integral tutor in 2004. At Saint Mary's, his courses have ranged from Managerial Analysis and Forecasting to Business Statistics to Marketing, from Greek Thought to Renaissance Thought to Critical Strategies, from

Freshman Mathematics to the Senior language tutorials in the Integral Program. In his teaching, his primary concern is nurturing the students' love of learning, critical thinking, and ethical awareness.

He works hard to meet students where they are. "I try to get a sense of what the student is moving towards," he said. "I guess all along, I've never thought of myself as trying to mold students into me. I'm trying to get a sense of who they want to be and if I can help them get there. And most of the students I encounter are undecided, uncertain. So the conversations are about talking to them about interests, goals, aspirations. That's really part of what I think I've done."

Ted is quick to point out that he wasn't an Integral student at Saint Mary's, but his affection for the program is easy to see. "What I think is important about Integral is that we're not discipline-focused. We're learning-focused. So in some ways, it's trying to help students be prepared for the long haul for their life. It's not the immediacy of the job they're going to get, but how to survive life. And so the ability to be in a situation where you don't necessarily share the same intellectual interests or political interests and the like, but you can find a way to have civilized conversations with each other. And it's essentially the dialectic, it's the mutual search for truth.

"And that includes the tutors. I don't consider myself an expert in anything. I just consider myself an older student. I may be a little bit better equipped than the younger students in how to find sources of information to help answer my own questions. But it doesn't mean that I have the answers. I still have those questions."

Tsukahara is grateful for having found the Integral Program, or perhaps its having found him. “I think my wife reminded me that once I got involved with Integral, when I left the Business School, she noticed that I had almost a rebirth. A new sense of commitment. And I think she recognized it was a student's engagement that provided joy that was important. Especially as I was aging.

“I guess the long and short of it is, if I had stayed in the business school world, with the MBA students and the like, I'd be retired. I mean, clearly the focus of the adult students—they deserve an education. No question about that. But they're at a state in life where in many ways they're trying to extend a path that they started, that didn't give them the confidence that our younger students get by doing Integral where if they hit a wall and they need to make a career change and the like, they're not necessarily going to be driven into getting another degree or sort of hoping that the degree will lend to the promotion that... It's strange to see it, but there's a sense of freedom that they seem to have when they go through life and they can roll with it. At least that's from the students that I've met over the years.”

Ted is happy to expound on the differences between Integral and other students. “There's a bit of, what do you call it? Self-confidence, that is different. A little bit of engagement, that is different. Do I regret not having done it when I was an undergraduate? No, because it wasn't for me. I mean, I'd be the first one to say, I would've been a terrible integrated student!

“Hopefully with the cohort type program we have, where we have interactions with the students, from freshmen to seniors, we have a chance to see them develop and help them see where they want to go,” Tsukahara continued. “So what works here, at least for me, is the ability to see and students help find their way. And their way doesn't have to be my way. I think that's the other thing that I discovered—that I don't need to essentially find disciples.”

They may not be disciples, but Tsukahara's students are eager to offer praise—and gratitude. “Tutor Tsukahara is very thoughtful and attentive,” said Integral Program major Joseph Petermann '22. “In my experience, he cares not only for the academic success of his students, but also for their personal health and well-being, as well as their professional future. He is a friend and ally to his students as much as he is a professor.”

Integral major Camilla Patterson '22 echoes these sentiments. “Tutor Ted challenges and expects the best from his students,” she said. “He always makes time to meet outside of class and encourages tutor and peer collaboration. He cares for his students' success within the classroom, but also makes an effort to ensure their success outside the classroom, as he assists in networking and offers career advice. Tutor Ted pushes me to be the best student and person I can be, and has been not only a great tutor, but mentor and friend.”

Tsukahara adores hearing from old students. A student from his Pomona College days sent him an email a few weeks ago about how he had helped the student get his first job out of college 50 years ago. “And again, it reminded me that, I guess, the instincts I have now were always there, but Integral has sharpened my sensitivity for students and their lives....Integral's been a blessing for me. It's made me better.”

And our professor of the year is much admired for his dedication to the Lasallian mission. “Professor Ted Tsukahara has joined the Brothers for morning prayer for the last 10 years,” said Brother Kenneth Cardwell, FSC. “And then joined the Brothers for eggs, bacon, and tater tots. My Breakfast with Ted has been a lesson in how to value liberal arts in the modern world, gambling, business practices and business education, Saint Mary's College men's and women's basketball, the rhetoric of budget-making, faculty appointments, and the life of Saint John Baptist de la Salle. A great start to the day.”

In Professor Tsukahara’s career, teaching and scholarship are about serving the common good. He has devoted an extraordinary amount of time and energy to service to the College and the wider community, including being as the chair of the Academic Senate twice, representing the faculty on the College’s Board of Trustees, serving on the Rank and Tenure Committee, chairing the Faculty Welfare Committee, and more. He is also an Affiliated Member of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and is the Director of the John F. Henning Institute.

Saint Mary’s congratulates Professor Tsukahara on his well-deserved Professor of the Year Award. A celebration will be held Friday, May 6.

Read about Professor Tsukahara’s experiences of life in an internment camp during World War II here.
(<https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/a-day-for-remembrance>)

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1928 St. Marys Road,
Moraga, CA 94575
(925) 631-4000

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