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CMU education prof is Michigan Professor of the Year

MOUNT PLEASANT — Norma Bailey believes in “target dates” instead of due dates, community standards and shared governance instead of attendance policies, and opportunities for improvement instead of hard-and-fast grading policies.

Some would call her unconventional. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching calls her the Michigan Professor of the Year.

Bailey, a CMU professor of teacher education and professional development, was named the 2007 recipient of the award during a Council for Advancement and Support of Education-sponsored celebration Nov. 15 in Washington, D.C. She was unable to attend the recognition event, but Bailey said she “feels good to be acknowledged for what I do.”



Photo by Peggy Brisbane, CMU

A CMU Excellence in Teaching Award recipient in spring 2007, Bailey was nominated for the statewide honor by Todd Zakrajsek, director of CMU’s Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching.

“She is an amazing teacher, creating exceptional learning environments for her students and regularly pushing them to achieve levels of work that I am convinced they themselves never realized they could accomplish,” Zakrajsek wrote in his nomination letter. “I can say without reservation that Dr. Norma Bailey is a rare and exceptional educator.”

Bailey, who has taught at CMU since 1996 and specializes in middle level education and diversity education, said her approach to teaching is simple, but she knows it also is effective.

“I want to help produce teachers who understand kids well and also know how to reach them in age-appropriate ways based on best practices,” she said. “In order to do that, I must live that philosophy, and I do so by always modeling in my classes that which I expect of them.”

CMU President Michael Rao applauded Bailey’s commitment to her students.

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“Norma Bailey clearly is a professor who takes seriously the great importance of educating future teachers,” he said. “By mentoring students as young professionals, Professor Bailey creates a climate that encourages tomorrow’s middle-grades teachers to take serious ownership of their learning and development so that they are compelled to lead as educators.”

Bailey, who has been nominated for the award twice previously, spent significant time pondering and revising her personal statement following her 2007 nomination, and she said the result was a sincere piece that reflects how she feels about students and teaching.

“Professionals are autonomous; they do what’s right because it’s the right thing to do, not because an outside force bribes or threatens them. From day one, these aspiring teachers are treated like young professionals, are expected to act like young professionals, and they do so,” Bailey wrote in her statement. “There is no attendance policy, but there is virtually 100% attendance in all classes. Students are expected to know who their class colleagues are, address their comments and questions to the whole class, and thus students build a strong learning community. All work is expected to be in by the end of the semester, and quality is expected on all work turned in, with revisions to be made if necessary, resulting in a strong work ethic and exceptional products.”

Bailey joins three CMU colleagues who have been named Michigan Professor of the Year during the past decade: marketing and hospitality services administration assistant professor Gary Gagnon, the 2005 recipient; geography professor Mark Francek, the 2002 recipient; and psychology professor Gary Dunbar, the 1997 recipient.

Recipients of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching awards are evaluated based on several criteria, including their letters of reference; professional vitae; teaching logs; two-page personal statements; and evidence of impact in and contributions to undergraduate teaching, as well as a scholarly approach to teaching and learning.

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