

Award for Distinguished Scholarship

Christopher C. Chabot
Professor of Biology

In the lab or at the ocean, it's all about collaboration for Chris Chabot. That interaction with other scientists and with students engaged in research at the undergraduate and graduate level is essential to the quality and scope of Chabot's investigations into the biological rhythms of animals.

"I always liked to try to figure out what made things work," Chabot says of his early interest in science. "I was encouraged by my parents and by my high school biology teacher—his enthusiasm inspired mine. A lot of us in this small high school in Cumberland, Maine, went on to biology careers. He instilled a sense of wonder and interest." The joy of collaboration came into play even then, Chabot recalls, "I had a really good buddy in high school and college who also loved biology. We fed off each other's interests. It's the same today, collaborating with my students and other scientists, like Win Watson at UNH."

Growing up along the coast, he was familiar with horseshoe crabs, lobsters, and other marine life. They became his subjects as he developed his study of circadian rhythms in animals. "I was interested in the importance of time to organisms—an area that had long been overlooked. Physiology and behavior can be so different within a 24 hour period—it's like two different animals—night and day." He is fascinated by circadian timing interacting with tidal timing, how these creatures survive and reproduce in the face of a changing environment.

Chabot has gained a national reputation in the field of biological rhythms, publishing 20 articles based on his original research, co-editing a volume of *Current Zoology*, serving on the editorial board of two peer-reviewed journals, and on three National Science Foundation review panels. The New Hampshire IDeA Network of Biomedical Excellence recognized his collaborative approach when they asked him to assume a leadership role working with 15 principal investigators throughout the state at eight different institutions.

Chabot also brings his dedication to collaboration into the classroom. "My goal is to get my students to tap into that sense of wonder and questioning that we have all experienced when we turn over a log in the forest or a rock in a stream," Chabot says. "I try to help them develop their questions and then come up with ways to attempt to answer them."

Chabot has developed expertise in writing successful grant proposals to fund "original, novel, and impactful" biological research, including undergraduate research assistantships. It's important to Chabot that his students have the opportunity to do actual research, not just read about the research of other scientists. "It gives our students a chance to *do* science," he says. Chabot sees this opportunity as an advantage Plymouth State University offers that can't be found at other, larger institutions, no matter how prestigious. "Our students in Biological Sciences get to do original research with a professor." His students also have the chance to

present and publish their findings, to a degree that is almost unprecedented at the undergraduate level.

Chabot is the first person at Plymouth State University to win both the Award for Distinguished Scholarship (2012) and the Distinguished Teaching Award (2007). “This has been such a collaborative experience,” he says. “I couldn’t have done any of it without my colleagues, my students, and my family. I have benefitted so much from all these people.”

Distinguished Adjunct Teaching Award

Annie Hager
Adjunct Faculty, Mathematics

“For many of my students, math anxiety is a major impediment to their understanding,” Annie Hager says of her Mathematics and the Humanities class. “But my students are good, even brilliant, at other things. I have seen them excel at athletics, or music, or on the stage. They are young artists, or philosophers, or writers. They are each unique individuals with a large capacity for knowledge, and over the course of a semester, we all end up learning from one another.”

Hager is fascinated by all the ways math is at work in the world—in art, music, nature, philosophy—and shares that fascination with her students. Lectures, animations, games, group activities all provide different approaches to understanding, along with plenty of opportunity for practice and extra help. Hager says, “I emphasize on that very first stressful day of class that it is important to reach out to one another, to ask for help, and to give help to others.” Attendance in her classes is excellent and she consistently hears her students say, “This is the first math class I’ve ever enjoyed coming to!”

Hager finds math in her life as well as her teaching. She discovered the importance of mathematical accuracy with her very first quilt, using a square template she’d been given that was off by an eighth of an inch. In the end, nothing fit. Today, her intricate, nature-themed quilts are recognized all over the region. Using curved shapes and multiple colors and fabrics, Hager brings the pieces together into a beautiful whole with geometric precision.

A garden of tomatoes, cucumbers, parsley, and zinnias is growing in the large, sunny windows of her office in Hyde Hall—a perfect greenhouse. Hager shares the office with four other adjunct instructors. “They’re just laughing at me,” she says. “They’re very tolerant of me.” When the time comes to plant the seedlings outside, Hager’s garden will be another opportunity to apply mathematics to daily life. “How to lay out a garden, when to plant, when to harvest—it’s all very scientific and mathematical,” she says, “but it’s also very *real*.”

Hager’s life has been something like a quilt or, perhaps, a garden. After graduating from St. Paul’s School in Concord, she earned her BS in biology from Stanford University, then came back east for an MS in forestry from the University of Maine at Orono. In Vermont, she discovered a love for teaching when Killington Mountain School needed a science teacher. The students were there for the ski season only, and each brought their own materials from their home schools, so Hager had the opportunity to discover the various science curricula being used across the country. Today, she and her husband, Stephen Murray, live in Plymouth with their son, Silas, and daughter, Sophie.

At PSU, Hager also teaches Statistical Literacy and First Year Seminars on topics like “Is Popular Culture Making Us Smarter?” and “Are Cell Phones Destroying Civilized Society?” She is pursuing her CAGS in educational leadership. But her heart will always be with Mathematics and the Humanities, and the opportunity it brings to open students’ eyes to a subject many find

opaque or intimidating. “It’s not just a bunch of equations,” Hager says. “It’s fun to show people that it’s got a very practical, rich side to it.”

2011 Patricia Storer PAT (Professional, Administrative, and Technical Staff) Award

Ann Thurston

Associate Vice President for Academic Administration and Finance

If home is where the heart is, Ann Thurston has definitely found her home at Plymouth State University.

Thurston was raised in Vermont and New Hampshire, moving too frequently for her liking. Her dream was to find the right place for her to *stay*. For Thurston, that place is Plymouth. When she arrived at the age of 17, “I didn’t understand the value of a degree,” Thurston recalls. But her mother, who had finished her own degree while raising three children, certainly did and brought Ann to visit Plymouth State. She’s been here ever since. And she’s learned the value of a degree, or in her case, three of them.

Thurston is humbled to receive the 2011 Patricia Storer PAT Award, which honors a beloved Plymouth State employee whose career was similar to Thurston’s in many ways, and for whom Thurston has great respect. Like Pat Storer, Thurston has held many roles on campus. She started by working in the library, served as manager of campus services, then as Bursar. Today she is Associate Vice President for Academic Administration and Finance. “I get to work with really fantastic people,” she says. “I have the opportunity to participate in the life of the university through supporting our students and faculty.” Thurston’s work covers every facet of Plymouth State University, from working with department chairs, to the Registrar’s office, to the office of sponsored programs. “I don’t really know where any day will take me,” she says. She particularly enjoys faculty research presentations and the enthusiasm PSU faculty show for their work. “I can’t take any credit for it,” she says with a laugh, “but I can share in it. We have some really great people.”

Travel plays an important role in Thurston’s life. Bringing together her Spanish major and history minor, Thurston recently completed El Camino del Santiago (The Way of St. James), a walk across Europe to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, that has been made by pilgrims for over a thousand years. “We walked through small towns and villages in the Spanish countryside,” Thurston said in a speech to the PSU community. “A woman called to us from a doorway to tell us we had wandered off the path. Another woman shouted from her balcony and gestured for us to turn around. People who live along the Way feel a responsibility to take care of pilgrims; keeping us on the Way. No one can walk the Way for you, but you do not walk alone.” She continued, “The Way is a metaphor for the journey of life. And I submit to you, parallels our students’ journey at PSU. Here they are with their travelling companions at the start of their journey. No one can do their work for them, but they are not alone. We, all of us, are their guides; we support them on their journey. Each of us plays a different role and we all contribute; helping them to reach their final destination.”

As much as she loves to travel, Thurston loves to come home even more. “Living in a university town provides so many opportunities,” she says. “Music, theater, the Medieval Forum, Sidore lectures—there’s always something happening, almost every night. I count my blessings every day. My glass is always half full.”

DISTINGUISHED OPERATING STAFF AWARD

Angela Torsey
Program Support Assistant, Office of Financial Aid

For many college students, approaching the Financial Aid Office can seem confusing, even intimidating. Until they meet someone like Angela Torsey. With her caring demeanor and bright smile, Torsey helps Plymouth State University students make their way through the labyrinth of funding their education.

Empathy and patience are two of her watchwords, which is why Torsey is so well known for her excellent customer service. “Good service is very important, because that’s what we’re all about,” she says. That means staying helpful and cheerful, as well as knowledgeable and professional, no matter how busy the Financial Aid Team is with budgets, FAFSA reports, and all the complexities that go along with understanding and meeting the intricate requirements of financial aid in a higher education environment. Even during the busiest time of the year, when incoming students are calling with questions and returning students are dropping by with more questions, Torsey is always ready to put the students’ needs first.

Torsey points out that she meets students and their families at a stressful time, especially since recent cuts to federal financial aid programs have changed some financial aid packages in unanticipated ways. “Families just want the best for their son or daughter, and to make it possible for them to go to Plymouth State,” she says. Torsey works with students and their parents to figure out their best financial aid options. She can often help them find creative solutions to meeting the cost of a university education, such as scholarship opportunities they might not have known about otherwise.

“Sometimes students have no idea why they’re at the window,” says Torsey. Their parents tell them to go to the Financial Aid Office, and they do, but without really knowing what they are supposed to do when they get there. “You have to be a little bit of a detective,” as Torsey puts it, to find out what the students really need, then walk them through the process. “The most important thing to me is that they know they can come to us at any time.”

Torsey puts her 12 years on the Financial Aid Team to good use, conducting \$SMART Meetings with students. These start with one-to-one conferences with individual students to work out recommendations for funding their education and keeping loan debt down as much as possible. Torsey follows up over multiple sessions, keeping in touch and helping the students navigate each stage of the financial aid process. Smart Meetings are open to students at any point in their university career, but Torsey notes it’s the juniors and seniors who keep her busiest.

Angela Torsey grew up in Wentworth, graduated from Plymouth Regional High School, and today lives in Campton, with her husband, Shawn, a trooper with the New Hampshire State Police force. She is the mother of Hunter, currently a middle-schooler at Campton Elementary School, and newborn Isabelle.

Torsey enjoys her colleagues on the Financial Aid Team. “They’re a great group of individuals,” she says, calling them “entertaining, hardworking, and dedicated.” But most of all, she enjoys her interactions with the students. “I love to be able to help someone obtain their dream of going to school,” she says. “It’s the best.”