



The Office of Academic Affairs and the Napa Valley College Foundation congratulate this year's recipients of the **McPherson Distinguished Teaching Award**, recognizing excellence in teaching and outstanding commitment to quality education:

**CATHY GILLIS**

*Professor of English, Distance Education Coordinator, and Honor Society Advisor*

**JEANNETTE McCLENDON**

*Professor of Counseling and Umoja Coordinator/Instructor/Counselor*

**JENNIFER KING**

*Professor of Theater Arts, Arts and Humanities Faculty Chair, Theater Arts Coordinator, Performing Arts Center Artistic Director, and Shakespeare Napa Valley Artistic Director*



**Cathy Gillis**

Cathy Gillis has been a professor in Napa Valley College's English department since 2002, but as one colleague noted, "The breadth of her experience and contribution to the Napa Valley College community, her excellent teaching skills, and her ability to connect with our diverse student population has enriched the lives of thousands of our students and their families."

In addition to her teaching duties, Cathy is also the Phi Theta Kappa (Honor Society) advisor and the Distance (Online) Education Coordinator for NVC. She was an informal DE coordinator when NVC first began offering online classes, but of course the need for online teaching and learning skyrocketed in March 2020. Cathy and her team quickly trained more than 600 faculty and staff during the pandemic, transitioning the entire college to a fully online learning environment.

Another colleague praised her "ongoing and varied commitment to her students," demonstrated by her work with Phi Theta Kappa ("Under her leadership, countless students have applied for and received transfer scholarships") and her work in developing the Puente program, a cross-disciplinary program that provides academic, counseling and mentoring support to students, particularly those with a Latinx and Mexican-American cultural background. She was also instrumental in bringing the Writing Success Center and other aspects of the Basic Skills Initiative to NVC.

*"I am honored to be selected as one of the McPherson Award recipients, particularly after such a difficult year during the pandemic and losing my mom earlier this year. What could be better than knowing how proud she was of me and winning an award for doing what I truly love."*

## **Jeannette McClendon**

Counselor Jeannette McClendon, fondly known as Ms. J, came to NVC in August 2013 and achieved tenure in 2017. She teaches aspiring counselors as well as providing guidance and support to new and continuing students, helping them through education planning, career assessment, graduation, transferring to a four-year program and personal counseling, when they need it.

“When I think of an example of excellence in teaching, counseling and community spirit, I think of Jeannette McClendon. A dedicated instructor who is constantly looking for new ways to enrich the lives of students through classroom instruction, service learning, integrated with the realities of life,” noted one nomination.

Jeannette’s work on committees and teams encourages the success of NVC students in many ways. A few of her many efforts are particularly notable: She serves as the retention lead for the Starfish program, an early alert tool that connects a team to enhance services and support for students who are on academic probation and facing dismissal. She also is coordinator for the Umoja Learning Community, which specifically targets the retention, persistence and success of African-American students and students from the African diaspora. Under Ms. J’s guidance, the program, a colleague notes, is “a beautiful multi-ethnic mosaic, largely in part of the openness and welcoming environment ... a multicultural space that welcomes all.”

That goal is furthered by her work, with others, to integrate the students of the Puente program, which focuses on Latinx and Mexican-American culture, into the learning community. Research shows that mentoring relationships, along with intentional and deliberate focus on successful strategies, help to increase positive outcomes for historically under-represented populations. It is because of this work and more that a colleague describes Jeanette as “a dedicated instructor who is constantly looking for new ways to enrich the lives of students through classroom instruction and service learning, integrated with the realities of life.”

She is also active in Academic Senate and Faculty Union, is the Counseling faculty liaison with the Communication Studies Department and serves on the Equity and Inclusivity Committee. “She is like the energy bunny – her job is never done until students feel respected and appreciated.” She is “a crusader for our students’ success. To put it more emphatically, A SUPERHERO!”

*“It is truly an honor to be recognized as one of the 2021 McPherson Distinguished Faculty members. When I came to NVC in August 2013, I had to hit the ground running. I had to teach, be a counselor, and transition into the coordinator role. I came to NVC without hesitation to provide a holistic approach – looking at the whole student and making sure I provide the best support I could – academically, emotionally, and spiritually (not necessarily from a religious point of view). My role often times goes above and beyond the four walls of the classroom or the counseling office, and [I am] happy that I can do both. I am equally as glad and surprised to know that someone noticed this and made the decision to consider me for this prestigious award.”*

## **Jennifer King**

Professor of Theater Arts Jennifer King has a deep resume in Bay Area, national and international theater arts. At NVC, she is professor, Arts and Humanities faculty chair, Theater Arts coordinator, Performing Arts Center artistic director, and Shakespeare Napa Valley founder and artistic director.

This year at NVC, King directed *Romeo and Juliet*, *Night of the Living Dead* and *A Chorus Line* as digital, online experiences for Napa Valley College's Shakespeare Napa Valley and Theater Arts programs. As one colleague put it, "Jennifer King is always pushing her practice to stay completely relevant to the needs of today's art. Speaking technically, when Covid-19 hit, she did not shy away from the remote forms of theatre available but embraced them and championed new directing conventions to allow storytelling to thrive in this new medium."

Students enrolled in Jennifer's classes share a sentiment of fascination and delight in Theater Arts, which she encourages and nurtures in her students "through her passion for the craft, love of education and technique, and drive for the individual growth of her students, regardless of their experience level."

"The commitment and enthusiasm she provides to our students is invaluable."

*"I am very moved to receive this award during a time when we are required to teach and direct online. I never in my wildest imagination thought I would find success teaching acting and directing online. The pandemic has helped me become a better teaching artist by embracing the challenges and opportunities a digital environment has to offer for expanding our creativity."*

**Congratulations, Cathy, Jeannette and Jennifer!**



*Thank you to everyone who took the time to submit a nomination.*

*The 2021 awardees will be honored and recognized for their achievement at the Board of Trustees meeting on May 13<sup>th</sup>, and at a special online ceremony on May 19<sup>th</sup>.*

### **The McPherson Award**

*From his vision and institutional leadership to his support of scholarships and encouragement for individual students, Napa Valley College Founding President Dr. Harry McPherson touched many lives. Each year, Napa Valley College awards the McPherson Distinguished Teaching Award to faculty members who are nominated for the honor by their peers, students, or community members for their commitment to excellence in education.*

*The awards are funded by the McPherson Endowment, established by Dr. McPherson and his family and now held by the Napa Valley College Foundation.*