

March 4, 2014

UMBC Staff Awards Committee

Karen L. Wensch Endowment Award for Outstanding Non-Exempt Staff

CSEE Department

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Dear Committee Members:

I am pleased and privileged to nominate Ms. Janet Gethmann for the Karen L. Wensch Endowment Award for Outstanding Non-Exempt Staff. Ms. Gethmann began her career in 1971 as a secretary in Financial Aid. In 1972 she moved to the Biological Science Department until 1975 when she left to raise a family. She really never completely left UMBC during this interlude and typed papers and books for faculty at UMBC. She returned full-time to UMBC to work in the Graduate School as Business Services Specialist from 1982 to 1997. There she not only carried out financial duties she organized graduate commencements, certified graduate students for graduation, developed the graduate assistant handbook, was the Editor, Scholarly Accomplishments Book produced yearly by Graduate School, developed and organized Ph.D. Robing Ceremony. Since 1997 she has been with the department of Computer Science and Electrical Engineering (CSEE) in the title of Business Services Specialist but in fact has been the head of administrative staff and assistant to the Chair in the department. She has consistently over her entire career taken on responsibilities that are typically done far above her pay grade.

While in CSEE Ms. Gethmann has served three chairs, John Pinkston, Charles Nicholas, and myself. This has been a monumental task for her that she took on and performed in the most outstanding manner. The department is home to: approximately 1600 students; 37 faculty; undergraduate programs in Computer Science and Computer Engineering; graduate programs in Computer Science, Computer Engineering, and Electrical Engineering; and a Professional Masters program in CyberSecurity. Without a doubt Ms. Gethmann is the glue and the operations manager that kept all of this running smoothly. To put this into perspective our administrative staff has until recently consisted of only two people, her and a program management specialist that Ms. Gethmann supervised. Ms. Gethmann would always see a critical need within the department and would take it upon herself to take care of the need. These tasks were not assigned and in essence she assigned the tasks to herself. She carried them out because she knew that it was necessary to keep the department running efficiently. Some of the details are outlined in the following.

Ms. Gethmann has been CSEE's scheduling coordinator for all of its courses. This has working with the registrar's office and other departments to get the necessary times and specific rooms for our classes. In CSEE as chairs and undergraduate and graduate program directors rotated through these positions, she became our default scheduling coordinator. The chair, the faculty, UPDs, and GPDs rely on her provide us with a workable schedule including times and locations. This effort would normally be handled by a faculty committee, but she has managed to take on this task and performed it brilliantly. Ms. Gethmann cares deeply about the students and has always ensured that their needs have been met. The lecturer that managed our Computer Science Help Center and undergraduate teaching assistants left UMBC. Ms. Gethmann took over that job for a couple of semesters to ensure that the functionality would continue to provide our undergraduates with the tutoring help they needed. Again, this was a faculty role! She instituted a database system that allowed CSEE to efficiently handle its large graduate admissions process. In addition this data base tracks the progress of graduate students in their progression through their programs. She is CSEE's facilities manager by default. Again no one was doing this task. She maintains all office assignments, juggling a large number of part-time faculty, graduate and undergraduate assistants. She is CSEE's liaison to the Facilities Management Department. She worked tirelessly with faculty and Facilities to organize and get a brand new innovative teaching laboratory up and running by the beginning of this semester. While consulting all parties she really managed the process including equipment and furniture orders. While this was not her job, she again took it on and in my opinion was the only person who could have accomplished this on time!

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Ms. Gethmann is a real people person and service oriented. She deals with students, visitors, faculty, and staff with the same “how can I help you” attitude. Her goal is always to get that person to the right place and help them solve whatever problem they are facing. Among these activities are coordinating the hiring of approximately 32 part-time faculty. She makes it a point to interface with these valuable adjuncts and ensures that they have what they need to carry out their assigned tasks.

Ms. Gethmann is also a leader and a trusted advisor. When there are difficult issues with a student, faculty member, or anything else in the department she is often the first person to know about the situation. She effectively triages these problems in very innovative ways. Often she is able to solve them without intervention by others using her vast knowledge of UMBC’s procedures and her considerable wisdom. In cases where she needs to make a recommendation she will have outlined the issue and present approaches that should be followed. As examples, CSEE has had several problems that required the advice of UMBC’s legal counsel. Ms. Gethmann has several times researched the options with the legal counsel and presented me with suggested solutions. I have then taken what she has presented to me including the preferred option and acted on it. She knows our teaching assistants’ performance in her interactions with students and faculty. She has often assigned TA’s to appropriate classes when faculty input has been lacking. As a chair and faculty member my work often takes me out of the office for extended periods of time. I am heavily engaged in research and must block out large parts of a day to be in my laboratory. Ms. Gethmann handles the departmental affairs in my absence. She only contacts me in situations that require my decision making. Her excellent judgment has kept the interruptions to a bare minimum. In speaking for myself and my colleagues, I feel Ms. Gethmann has truly run the department during her time here. I can think of no better candidate for the Karen L. Wensch Endowment Award.

Sincerely,

Gary Carter
Professor and Chair, Computer Science and Electrical Engineering