

2013 ALUMNUS OF POINT LOMA AWARD Recipients

Dr. Randal Skidgel (74)



After Dr. Randal Skidgel earned his degree in chemistry from PLNU, he went on to receive a doctorate in physiology and pharmacology from the University of California, San Diego, in 1979. After completing a postdoctoral fellowship and a stint as a research assistant professor at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Skidgel accepted a tenure-track position at the

University of Illinois College of Medicine at Chicago in 1985. He is currently professor of pharmacology as well as the director of graduate studies in pharmacology there.

Skidgel's research focuses on the regulation of peptide hormones and their receptors, in particular bradykinin and angiotensin, and their function within the cardiovascular system. The ultimate goal of his work is to identify potential therapeutic targets for improving endothelial barrier function to reduce mortality in patients with acute lung injury or acute respiratory distress syndrome. He has received continuous grant funding for his research from the National Institutes of Health since 1989—a feat that has become more challenging over time as competition has grown and as the pressure on faculty to fund much of their own salary and their graduate students' stipends has increased.

His efforts have paid off. In 2012, Skidgel was awarded the E.K. Frey-E. Werle Foundation Promotion Prize, a prestigious honor for research scientists. He was recognized for "his fundamental discoveries of enzymes that control the activities and functions of peptide hormones that play important roles in regulating cardiovascular functions, especially in inflammation."

In addition to teaching and research, Skidgel's role includes mentoring doctoral degree students and directing the graduate program, which are among his favorite job responsibilities.

"It's rewarding to facilitate student success in my lab and in the program," Skidgel said. "I enjoy seeing students publish or get results. It's also rewarding to help get them over the hurdles that come when a project doesn't seem to be going well; I enjoy helping them keep motivated with assurance that it will work eventually."

"We at PLNU are fortunate to have an alumnus of faith mentoring graduate students and post-doctoral fellows at a major university," said Dr. Dale Shellhamer, PLNU chemistry professor emeritus.

Skidgel has also published more than 150 journal articles, reviews, and book chapters and is often an invited speaker to various events.

Outside of his professional work, Skidgel and his wife, **Debbie (75)**, are active in their church, where Randy sings in the choir. His interest in music harkens back to his college days when he sang in Male Chorale and with a traveling music group called "The Power Company," which reunited last year to sing at the Class of '72 reunion and a local church. Skidgel also enjoys bicycling. Randy and Debbie have two adult children, Wes and Jennifer.

"As a Christian husband, father, and professional, Randy lives up to the calling of Christ to be authentic," said friend Steve Seelig, who is PLNU's senior director of planned giving. "His life is strong evidence of a balanced walk with Christ that makes him so successful in every endeavor."

Dr. Kathy McConnell (B.A. 70, M.A. 71)



Dr. Kathy McConnell has given 35 years of service to PLNU, most recently in the role of dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

As dean, McConnell is responsible for hiring and evaluating faculty, assessing the nine academic departments under her purview, revising curriculum, and working closely with the department chairs.

"One of the parts I enjoy most is hiring and running searches," McConnell said. "It's exciting because that's the future. I love to learn what makes the candidates tick, what excites them. Hiring the right people is a way to leave a legacy and something I can do for the university in tandem with the departments and chairs."

McConnell's job is often fast-paced and requires the ability to address competing concerns under pressure. Though McConnell says that quick decision-making and adaptability don't come naturally to her, her level-headedness, methodical nature, and genuine care for people make her a highly respected leader.

"When it came time for me to identify someone for the vacant role of the dean of arts and sciences, Kathy was the first person I thought of," said PLNU's provost, Dr. Kerry Fulcher. "I could think of no other person more qualified for the role and who had the complete confidence of the faculty than her."

Prior to accepting the position of dean in 2010, McConnell was a professor of Spanish in the Department of Literature, Journalism & Modern Languages. During her tenure, she served as department chair as well as interim chair. She helped launch the Spanish major shortly after joining the university in 1979. She has been on nearly every committee on campus and has served as chief academic marshal for Commencement. She is currently chair of the Academic Policies Committee, which plays a key role in ensuring the quality of PLNU's academic programs.

McConnell earned a bachelor's in Spanish and a master's in education from PLNU before going on to receive a master's in Spanish literature from Boston College in 1978 and a doctorate in Hispanic languages and literature from UCLA in 1988.

She is active in several professional organizations, including the North American Christian Foreign Language Association (NACFLA), for which she served on the executive board for seven years.

"I'm very much surprised by what I've ended up doing," said McConnell. "I had planned to be a high school teacher, but as doors opened, I would take advantage of the opportunities, even if I was nervous. What I tell students is, when a door opens, walk through it."

McConnell has traveled throughout Mexico and Europe, spending considerable time in Spain. For fun, she actively participates in several chat rooms based in Madrid. She also enjoys visiting the condo in Red Lodge, Mont., that she and her husband, PLNU biology professor Dr. Michael McConnell, own. The McConnells have one adult son, Jonathan.

David Clouse (79)



After graduating from PLNU with a bachelor's in business administration, David Clouse failed at several business ventures, experienced a lackluster real estate career, and was mildly accomplished as a computer programmer/analyst before launching the highly successful Vacation Rentals By Owner website (VRBO.com) in 1995.

Working in his basement, Clouse initially built VRBO to advertise the ski condo his family owned in Breckenridge, Colo. After three years, the site had become so popular that it grew into his full-time passion. Today, VRBO is still the website many travelers go to first to locate vacation rentals around the world.

Clouse hired friends from church and relatives, including his wife **Lynn (Reynolds) (79)**, who ran the billing department. Their efforts to run VRBO as a Christ-centered business, where employees were encouraged to pray for each other and for clients, helped create a flourishing virtual workplace. As business expanded, David and Lynn eventually decided to manage VRBO's affairs from a small island in the Caribbean where they lived for three years. Near the end of 2006, they sold VRBO and returned to Colorado shortly thereafter.

Upon the sale of VRBO, the Clouse family established the Find Us Faithful Foundation. The foundation supports many Christian organizations and endeavors with a particular emphasis on education and community development. To make a lasting impact, Clouse has guided Find Us Faithful to partner with organizations that combine great causes with sustainable business models, including Hope International, Plant With Purpose, Healing Waters International, and World Vision.

"We ask: how do we empower people to help themselves?" Clouse explained. "How do we know that it's actually doing good and serving the purpose? We look for ways to support projects that have a way to be sustainable."

As chairman of the board, David works closely with Lynn; his sons, Mat (foundation president) and **Michael (08)**; his two daughters-in-law; and his sister and her husband.

Edwin Anderson, CEO of Healing Waters International, said, "In the course of one's life, one occasionally has the opportunity to establish relationship with a rare human being—rare in the sense of authentic intelligence, character, integrity, humility, generosity, and faith ... Such is the case with the person of David Clouse. It is the sum of these qualities and values that truly marks the life of this man. While he has achieved extraordinary success in business, this success does not define him. What defines him is the intentional manner in which he has managed his success. He is defined by his stewardship, the consistency of his walk with God, his love for his family, and his loyalty to his friends. What defines him is his generosity and character as a man of God. What defines him is the consistency of his life, actions, and decisions."

When he's not working with or otherwise spending time with his family, Clouse enjoys bicycling, motorcycling, traveling, skiing, gardening, and practicing hospitality.

Dr. Dan Lopez (B.A. 92, M.A. 96) Damen Lopez (B.A. 94, M.A. 98)



Both Dan and Damen Lopez began their careers as teachers and then became administrators. In 2006, they started TurnAround Schools, which helps schools improve student performance by emphasizing college readiness from the elementary grades on. Damen is the organization's founder, and Dan serves as its president and business manager.

TurnAround Schools focuses on teaching schools and districts "six exceptional systems" that Damen developed while principal of Los Penasquitos Elementary in San Diego: 1) a culture of universal achievement; 2) collaboration; 3) standards alignment; 4) assessment; 5) data analysis; and 6) interventions.

Los Penasquitos was historically under-performing, but with Damen's systems, it became extraordinary. The school now has a 10-out-of-10 rating, has received the designation of a National Blue Ribbon School, and is a Model Title I School.

TurnAround Schools has helped other schools make similar improvements. Each becomes part of its network, No Excuses University (NEU). Los Penasquitos Elementary was the first school added to the NEU network, which now includes more than 180 schools serving 120,000 students in 22 states.

After recently moving their headquarters close to Dallas, Texas, the brothers are currently focused on the early stages of their long-term goal to build an NEU university campus for foster children. In the short term, they are preparing for their summer institutes and their fourth annual national convention, which will be held in Las Vegas in October 2014 and feature keynote speaker Jack Canfield, co-creator of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series.

"Damen and Dan have impacted thousands of lives through their work in public education," said **Kevin Ogden (78)**, superintendent at Julian Union School District. "Dan and Damen are strong examples of how to model a Christian lifestyle in the workplace. They demonstrate care and the highest level of ethics and integrity. They are involved in their church and make a significant contribution to the mission of the church."

Damen earned his bachelor's in liberal studies and master's in education, both from PLNU. In October 2013, the second edition of Damen's book, *No Excuses University*, was released. The new edition updates and combines information from Damen's first two books, *TurnAround Schools: Creating Cultures of Universal Achievement* and *No Excuses University*. Damen and his wife, Lara, have four daughters: Sophia, 13, Olivia, 10, Mia, 7, and Ava, 5.

Dan earned a bachelor's in business administration and master's in education from PLNU. He received a doctorate in education from Alliant International University in 2005. He is currently the president of PLNU Education Associates, an Alumni Association auxiliary. Previously, Dan served as an adjunct faculty member at Alliant and PLNU, a governing school board member in Ramona, Calif., and president of the California League of Middle Schools. Dan and his wife, **Michelle (Sutter) (97)**, have two sons: Jake, 13, and Nathan, 11.

Dan and Damen continue to have a strong sibling bond and spend much of their free time with their families and at their church. They live 12 doors down from one another.