

May 15, 2017

Nomination of Lori Johnson for a 2017 Western Award of Excellence

We are very pleased to nominate Lori Johnson for a 2017 Western Award of Excellence. Lori is the Graduate Administrator in the Geography Department at Western. Lori has been at Western since 2002. She has worked in the School of Nursing, the Faculty of Law, and with SGPS. In 2009, she came to us highly recommended by SGPS when our position of Graduate Administrator became available.

We summarize here Lori's contributions within the categories of the Western Award of Excellence based on all the letters of support we received. Our solicitation yielded 17 letters totaling 24 pages, far exceeding the page limitation. Support included those from 3 current or former graduate chairs and 10 graduate students; these show the critical support she has played in the lives of our graduate students and in the evolution of our graduate program.

Contributes to providing an outstanding Western Experience

It is clear from all the letters, but especially those from graduate students, that Lori is a critical element in facilitating the Western Experience for graduate students, especially our large cohort of international graduate students. Their letters attest to Lori's engagement with them from the time of application and of multiple instances of Lori facilitating the application process for international students by helping supply necessary documents for visa approval, sometimes on very short notice. Once they arrive, Lori continues this support, often helping to help navigate the complexities of life in London as well as their journey within our Graduate program. One student wrote, "I felt very much supported by her constant attentive approach". Faculty also recognize Lori's knowledge of the graduate students; a former grad chair writes, "[she] knows the students intimately; their strengths, their quirks and above all their needs and how to fulfil and manage those needs in the best ways possible". This support is recognized as "play[ing] a major role in our graduate recruitment and retention process." At a time when departmental graduate enrolments have more than tripled, and there is a University emphasis on improving both our research and international profiles, Lori's contributions are even more notable – a former Graduate Chair writes "What is most impressive about this transition is that student morale has never been higher." And another: "She understands the critical role that graduate students play in research and teaching and goes beyond what is required to ensure graduate student success and therefore increasing levels of excellence at the university." Finally, it is clear that the impact of the Western Experience has made a lasting impact on the graduate students, such that after they have graduate "Lori is often the first point of contact when our alumni return to visit."

Promotes leadership and personal growth

In this category, we draw attention to two themes:

Leadership: Lori has exemplified leadership to the institution by her pivotal contributions in the development of a faculty level database for graduate information. In this initiative, she was described as a "strong force for change". She was instrumental in initiating the database and getting buy-in from graduate assistants in other departments. This work was described as "an extraordinary undertaking outside of Lori's normal duties as the Graduate Assistant". The database is identified as being 'incredibly useful' by our Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, who expects it to be a major time-saver

for Grad Chairs, Grad Assistants and the Dean's office. Within the department, she has taken a lead on organizing meetings that provide students with information on our program elements so they better understand the process and the expectations. On a personal level, Lori has demonstrated leadership and personal growth through her completion of a General Business program part time at Fanshawe College.

Motivation and mentoring: Lori has mentored three graduate chairs; Lori's excellence is a reason we are able to have willing faculty to take on administrative roles in an environment of restricted resources. Both former and current graduate chairs extoll Lori's critical help in their roles: "[She] routinely draws out the excellence in herself and others", and "She models those values [integrity, respect and commitment to service] for us, but it is so easy to not notice that which is normalized, taken for granted." For graduate students too, she has served as a motivator, for one international student, who was struggling with statistics – her simple words "Moses, you can do it" was the encouragement that was needed.

Mentoring of graduate students is clear from their experience – she is the first point of contact for students dealing with issues such as barriers to completion, TA issues, financial problems, and health and personal issues. The students seek her advice, respect her opinion and appreciate her discretion. They note her conscientiousness, empathy, strength and kindness, and caring and open personality. For many students, Lori has played an important role in acquiring scholarships and funding: "She was meticulous and comprehensive in her review of the application, and I doubt I would have been successful without her support." One faculty member, describing the collective experience of many of our international graduate students wrote: "According to many students, Lori's encouragement has made them become active members of the Western community, including taking active roles in the department committee work and in university programs."

Builds and fosters Western's Core Values (Integrity, Respect and Commitment to Service)

Lori's commitment to service is widely recognized among the staff, faculty and student letters received. Her dedication to service has meant that Geography outperforms relative to its size on scholarships. She has been integral to fostering a multicultural and diverse atmosphere for our many international students, from the time of first contact with Western, through to completion of their program, helping Western to raise its profile internationally. In the words of one graduate student: "She deals with the group of students from a multi-cultural backgrounds with so much respect that none has felt sidelined by her." Her help has extended to providing clothing for some of our international students who arrive unprepared for Canadian winters.

Lori also fosters Western Core Values through her contributions to staff development activities. She has been an active member within UWOSA – chairing meetings, as a union steward and captain of a strike committee. Locally she has participated in and helped to organize departmental United Way Fund raising events.

Finally, to summarize, we quote from the letter of an international graduate student, Roger Antabe "Lori embodies the Western and Canadian values of service, commitment, respect, integrity and care. She loves her job, and by this has touched the lives of many graduate students including me."

James Voogt, Associate Professor & Chair

Lelanya Milley, Administrative Officer