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Hi-resolution photos can be downloaded at:

[http://www.wou.edu/president/public\\_relations/commencement\\_2006/](http://www.wou.edu/president/public_relations/commencement_2006/)

## **WOU honors top faculty and staff**

**MONMOUTH** – Western Oregon University has named this year’s Mario and Alma Pastega Awards. Sharon Oberst, professor of dance, received the Teaching Excellence Award, an annual honor to a full-time faculty member who demonstrates excellence in teaching and relationships with students. Professor of Spanish Eduardo González-Viaña was given the Scholarship Award, which honors a full-time faculty member who demonstrates outstanding creative or scholarly accomplishments. Lori Pagel, library circulation assistant, received the Staff Excellence Award in recognition of her exceptional service to the university.

### **Sharon Oberst – Award for Excellence in Teaching**

If Sharon Oberst had been told at age 17 she would end up a dance professor, she wouldn’t have been very happy. By that age, she had devoted 13 years of pain and sacrifice to becoming a professional ballet dancer. At the age of four she began taking ballet and tap classes.

Living in Houston, she had many opportunities to study with great ballet masters from the Ballets Russes, the Royal Ballet, the New York City Ballet and American Ballet Theatre.

Oberst knew by age 11 she wanted to become a professional ballet dancer. It was her single focus from then on. She was so focused on her goal that she danced through injuries she should not have performed with.

Today, x-rays and MRIs tell a grim tale of multiple fractures, worn down cartilage and scar tissue from injuries she was unaware of. The cost was her performing career.

“I learned a lot about dancing during my time in the professional world. As a dance educator, I’ve learned a lot about everything else,” Oberst says. “Had I not gone to college and then on to

graduate school, I wouldn't have faced nearly the range of challenges, nor had the range of opportunities I have found on the academic side of the fence."

Oberst is thankful for the opportunities she's had in a university setting, including teaching and choreographing for a blind tap dancer and a deaf body builder.

Prior to her 19 years of teaching at WOU, she earned a bachelor's in dance and a secondary teaching certification in dance and theatre from Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. She was advised during her undergraduate career to get a graduate degree so she could teach dance at the college level. She did and she's glad she made the choice to study at University of Oregon to earn a master's in dance.

Since joining WOU, Oberst has choreographed and directed dozens of theatre, musical and dance productions. Most recently she directed and choreographed the *West Side Story* musical production in March.

Her students appreciate her hard work and dedication to all performances and classes.

WOU student Rebecca Chadd has known Oberst for two years and worked with her on "West Side Story." "Sharon is the most patient, composed professor I've had the privilege of working with. I am amazed at her professionalism and consistently positive attitude."

Chadd commended Oberst for her unwavering dedication to "West Side Story." While battling excruciating pain from a recent neck injury, Oberst made sure the cast stayed on track with choreography.

Colleague Deborah Jones characterizes Oberst as an outstanding educator, "a dedicated and caring mentor, giving of her time and self to encourage academic and personal growth."

### **Eduardo González-Viaña – Award for Scholarship**

Since moving to America from his native country of Perú, Spanish professor Eduardo González-Viaña has had one mission: to build a bridge among communities, especially with Latinos in the Willamette Valley. His work as both an educator and writer focuses on immigrant life in America.

While living in Perú, he earned a doctorate in Spanish languages and a law degree, both from the Universidad Nacional de Trujillo, Perú, and a journalism degree from the Colegio de Periodistas del Perú. He came to WOU in 1993, after working at the University of California, Berkely, for a short time. "I read some interesting information about WOU; I knew it was a small university in a small community," González-Viaña says. "I felt I would be able to work as a professor and a writer with enough inspiration."

Within a year of moving to Monmouth, he came up with the idea for the Building a Bridge outreach program. He matches WOU students who can speak Spanish with local Latino families who speak little to no English. These students tutor families in literacy, basic English, driving laws, American

history and other skills. “I feel like I am accomplishing a mission. I’m always trying to establish a link among the different communities,” he says.

To date, this program has helped almost 900 area families he has found through outlets such as churches and Spanish radio stations. “For many, this is their first true learning experience with somebody of a different culture,” he says. “Usually, half of my students end up becoming friends with their families, even after the class is over.”

Humanities Division Chair Carol Harding says the program “helps our students broaden their horizons, especially when they come from a more Anglo community and don’t have any understanding of some of the difficulties those in the Latino community face.”

In addition to the Building a Bridge program, González-Viaña spends much of his time writing, mostly short stories and novels. He was 15 when his first was published. Since then he has published more than 20 books and nearly 400 articles. His most recent publication was an English-translated version of his *New York Times* bestseller *Los Suenos de America*. This collection of short stories comprises fictionalized testimonials from participants in his Building a Bridge program and people he has met while traveling America.

He also writes a weekly column titled “Correo de Salem,” which is published in approximately 30 newspapers in the Americas. For his writings, he has been awarded Perú’s National Prize for Literature, the International Juan Rulfo Award, and the prestigious Latino Literature Prize by the Latin American Writers Institute of New York.

He will be on sabbatical during the upcoming school year and has been invited to speak at universities in Perú, Columbia, Norway and Sweden. González-Viaña is glad he made the decision to come to WOU. “Oregon is a beautiful place. I feel like I’m in the scenario of films of the far west that I saw in my childhood.” He says he’s still waiting to speak to Roy Rogers.

### **Lori Pagel — Staff Excellence Award**

Lori Pagel’s coworkers say that if there’s one thing that stands out about her, it’s that she goes above and beyond in everything she does. Although she is officially the circulation assistant at Hamersly Library, she has taken on many other roles in her 19 years of service to WOU.

Pagel’s duties include: supervising the check-out desk; training, supervising and scheduling student workers; uploading student and faculty information from banner into the library system; accounts receivable; working with the Summit catalog; and she serves as the representative for WOU to the Summit committee, which includes 33 other institutions in the Northwest.

Although her career is in library work, it didn’t begin that way. In fact, she had never considered working in a library when she began her schooling.

Pagel completed the clerical technology program at Chemeketa Community College and took the required test to be considered for state clerical jobs. Scoring high and being named the outstanding student in the program her graduating year, she was offered a great job with WOU's library. She hadn't considered work in a library, but she's glad she took a chance and the job.

"It's been a very great place to work – when you have good people to work with both in the library and around campus who are going for the same goal, it's a positive environment," Pagel says. "The staff has always worked together well and done things to better the library for everyone."

One of the experiences Pagel is most proud of is taking part in is a scholarship program in the library that began in 1993. Along with several library staff members, Pagel has continued this project since then, providing a scholarship to be awarded to library student workers. She encourages faculty and staff members to make payroll deductions toward scholarships for all WOU students.

Director of Library and Media Services Gary Jensen recalls one of Pagel's most notable contributions being her work in helping to automate the college library in the early 1990s. "She has been very astute at working with and exploiting our automation system. Most recently, she has become an expert in the use of the Orbis Cascade library consortium software. Because of her expertise and ability to train, she has helped other library staff members in the consortium to learn how to use the system," he says.

Pagel's coworkers also appreciate her flexibility and positive attitude in doing whatever it takes to get the job done. She routinely goes out of her way to help library patrons, and reports enjoying a job where she can serve the faculty, staff and students.

"Lori is one of the hardest workers I have ever met," says Camila Gabaldón, collection development librarian. "Her energy and enthusiasm for providing quality library service are matched only by her concern on behalf of library patrons."

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