



NEWS

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El Camino College Names Mercedes Thompson and Patricia Witherall 2008 Distinguished Faculty and Staff

El Camino College professor **Mercedes Thompson** and staff member **Patricia Witherall** were honored at a May 22 reception for their dedication to the college, students and colleagues.

The honorees for the 2008 Distinguished Faculty and Staff Award were recognized at the 11th Annual El Camino College Faculty and Staff Appreciation Day, an event designed to thank all members of the campus community for their commitment to the college and its educational mission.

Dr. Mercedes Thompson, a professor of Spanish and Chicano/Latino literature, is widely known as a dedicated advocate for students, a consummate professional in her field, and an inspiration to all students who enter her classroom.

"Mercedes is a teacher who gives 110 percent of herself without wanting anything in return except for us to accomplish our dreams," wrote one of her students.

In her 24 years at El Camino College, Thompson has never ceased to work on projects that benefit students and the college. For example, her research was instrumental in creating the foreign language department's first computer-assisted instruction lab. She has also been a Puente Project mentor since the program began, and was the faculty coordinator for the Honors Transfer Program during its formative years. She is a 2002 El Camino College Women of Distinction Award winner, is a member of the Academic Senate Council, and is on the faculty development and library committees.

Beyond ECC, her many awards include: Outstanding Foreign Language Educator from the California Foreign Language Teachers Association, and the Hayward Award for Excellence in Teaching from the Board of Governors for the California Community Colleges. Thompson's original contributions in her field have earned her a Fulbright-Hayes Grant to take elementary school and community college faculty to Mexico for a month, a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to study Spanish and indigenous cultures in Mexico and New Mexico, and a Rotary Foundation grant to study culture in Ecuador.

Her commitment to students extends to the community, where she is an active participant in her local PTA, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Little League and the Manhattan Beach Sister City Committee. Professionally, Thompson is an active member of the Modern and Classical Language Association and recently coordinated its annual conference. She is also director of the area's California Foreign Language Project, and on the board of the California Language Teacher Association.

Thompson has a doctorate in Spanish-American literature from the University of Colorado, a master's degree in school management and administration from Pepperdine University, another master's in Spanish/Latin-American studies from the University of Colorado, and a bachelor's degree in English from Douglass, Rutgers University.

Patricia Witherall is known by many as the "voice of El Camino College." As the college's lead PBX operator, Witherall is often the first contact many people have with El Camino College. Her friendly manner immediately welcomes callers and visitors to campus, assuring all guests that they will find the assistance they need.

"Pat's positive attitude and work ethic are admirable qualities," wrote one co-worker.

"She always goes above and beyond to help our students," said another. "She is pleasant, professional and courteous to all."

Witherall's dedication to excellence and enthusiasm for "a job well done" ensures that each caller or visitor who approaches her with a question will find an appropriate answer. If she is not able to personally assist, she will quickly find someone who can. In her dedication to help students, Witherall is extremely sensitive to the workload of others and makes an effort to learn exactly what is required, knowing that the question might arise again.

Well-known for her kindness beyond her work duties, Witherall goes out of her way to make sure students have had a bite to eat or change for the bus. Her generosity is seen in many ways – she often does not participate in the various social events on campus, instead insisting others attend and offers to cover phones and greet visitors in their absence.

Witherall attended Chandos School for Girls in Harrow, Middlesex, England – her native country. Former employment positions in London also covered PBX duties, but she has called El Camino College "home" for the past 32 years. Her laughter is contagious – time spent with Witherall leaves everyone with a smile.

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