



WHEN  
CANISIUS  
ALUMNI GATHER,  
THE CONVERSATION  
ULTIMATELY TURNS  
TO THE FACULTY OF  
THE COLLEGE.

RECOLLECTIONS  
OF  
GREAT TEACHERS,  
SPECIAL MOMENTS  
IN THE CLASSROOM  
AND MENTORING  
THAT MADE  
ALL THE DIFFERENCE  
IN THE PATHS OF  
THEIR LIVES  
FILL THE ROOM  
AND  
FORMER STUDENTS  
RECALL ONCE AGAIN  
WHY CANISIUS  
REALLY MATTERS  
IN THEIR LIVES.

psyched *for*

P S Y C H O L O G Y

Dr. Neva Sanders

**T**his special role of the faculty at Canisius and the unique nature of the bonds that are formed between teachers and students make recruitment of new faculty to Canisius a challenge. Across the college, academic departments search for someone who will be the type of professor that students and alumni will remember for awakening in them a passion for a particular subject. Fortunately, the college is nearly always successful.

In the case of Dr. Neva E. Sanders, assistant professor of psychology, perhaps it was her own experience at Oklahoma State University that prepared the way for her to become a special kind of teacher.

“I took an abnormal psychology class from a child psychologist freshman year and I knew right then that’s what I wanted to do,” she recalls. “I really didn’t know anything about the field but it was the professor who absolutely loved what he did and I just found it fascinating.”

That professor’s passion for his work coupled with the excitement he brought to the classroom was all Dr. Sanders needed to convince her to change majors from pre-med to psychology. She went on to earn her three degrees in child psychology from OSU and later pursued a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of California School of Medicine in San Diego. But she never forgot that professor freshman year, who influenced the course of her life. Now, 12 years later, Dr. Sanders is playing just as significant a role in the lives of her students.

Her mission begins in the classroom and mirrors that of her first psychology professor. Perhaps her most notable attribute is her ability to get students excited about what they are learning.

“I remember what it was like to be a

student and sit through boring classes with very little interaction or stimulation” says Dr. Sanders. “So I am always trying to get students involved — not just sitting but actively participating.”

And the students respond.

“Her attitude toward teaching is ‘If I don’t seem interested in the work, then how can I expect you to be interested,’” explains Peter Martin ‘02, one of Dr. Sanders’ psychology students. He adds, “She prefaced the course on the first day saying ‘This is great stuff.

This is the most powerful stuff you will ever use in life. I love this stuff.’ That really makes you want to learn.”

Not surprisingly, this relative newcomer to Canisius (she arrived in fall 1999) is quickly earning a reputation among students. Her courses are always among the first to fill up, with majors and non-majors both clamoring for a seat in her class. And her enthusiasm for psychology is actually attracting more students to her field.

“I took an abnormal psychology class with Dr. Sanders first and was only sort of interested in the topic,” recalls Kristy Mangione, a 2000 graduate now pursuing a master’s degree in social work at the University at Buffalo. “But after I took her class, I knew that’s what I wanted to

do. It fascinated me. The cases she would talk about and the experiences she had — I began to see myself wanting to follow in her footsteps.”

These are gratifying words for Dr. Sanders, who does not hesitate to tell students she too was inspired by the fervor of a former professor. But they are words that carry much responsibility. Dr. Sanders knows that if her students are to break into the competitive field of psychology, they must first be able to show



Dr. Neva Sanders works with her students in groups to promote classroom interaction and stimulation.

experience in applying classroom techniques to real case situations.

That’s where Dr. Sanders’ innovative teaching methods and emphasis on real world experience come into play. Rather than study textbook cases, students are taught and trained with ‘real case situations,’ which come straight from Dr. Sanders’ own professional experiences in the field.

“I use all my previous experiences in the classroom,” she says. “I’ve worked in child-adolescent psychiatric hospitals and dealt with some of the worst pathology

and disorders. I have a lot of clients and cases on tape — people who have agreed to let me interview them for teaching purposes. So I talk a lot about those kids in class, about the diagnosis they came in with, what led up to those disorders and how these things could have started.”

Psychology students are then strongly encouraged to participate in one of 14 practica (or internships), which she makes available to junior and senior psychology majors. Designed to give students the ‘real world’ training they need to get their foot in the door to a future job, a practicum enables students to work with children of any age, in a school, group home, treatment facility or hospital setting, throughout the city of Buffalo. Dr. Sanders describes it as a ‘win-win’ situation.

“The practica in this area are fabulous,” she notes. “I can’t teach that kind of stuff in class. Sure, it’s interesting for students to listen to it in class but it’s a totally different ball game once they get out there and actually do it. What’s more, the facilities are desperate to have people come in and work for them. So the students work free and get free training. It’s really a nice trade off.”

Peter Martin might not have believed this had he not participated in a practicum last summer, at



Dr. Sanders quizzes Peter Martin '02 in one of her upper-level psychology courses.

a research and clinical camp for kids with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD).

“The practicum really gives you great one-on-one experience in working with the kids,” he found out. “You really learn and see how effective psychology can be in helping them. It’s one of those things where you can hear and read about it in class, but until you actually experience it — it means a lot more.”

That experience puts students at an advantage and makes them more marketable when it comes time to enter the workforce. Take for example last semester (spring 2001) when six of Dr. Sanders’

Kristy Mangione '00 outside Buffalo’s Child & Adolescent Treatment Services center, where she works.



senior students were hired to continue the work they were doing as an intern.

But Dr. Sanders sees an even greater benefit to the practicum.

“It’s an excellent opportunity for students to really figure out what they want to do career-wise,” she notes. “The practicum puts it all together for them and helps students solidify their career goals as to what exactly they want

to do when they’re done with college and what they’ll need to do to get to that point. It may mean graduate school or special certification.”

Kristy Mangione thought she wanted to be a school counselor, until she did her first (of three) practica in a high school counseling office.

“They definitely help you see if the field you’re in is right for you because you get hands-on experience,” she says. “I originally thought school counseling was for me and once I got there I decided it wasn’t.”

That psychology majors leave Canisius with a clearer idea of what the future

holds is all the reassurance Dr. Sanders needs to know she is doing the job she set out to do.

“To feel as though you’ve had an impact on the student in some way — that is so important,” she says. “That means the world to me.” ■