

The many faces of adult learning

Three award-winning Western students reflect the new and varied faces of today's adult learners. The London Council for Adult Education has issued its Adult Learner Awards on May 1 to Luis Pastor Solano-Flores, Barbara White and Tammy Johnston.

LUIS PASTOR SOLANO-FLORES

How much education is enough?

That point has yet to be reached by Luis Pastor Solano-Flores who has completed an undergraduate degree in Chemical Engineering, Master of Science and PhD in Physiology with a specialization in Neuroscience, and continues to take courses.

Solano-Flores is currently employed at The University of Western Ontario as a research scientist and technical officer in the CIHR Group in Skeletal Development and Remodeling. This role has moved him away from his technical comfort zone and exposed him to the human side of the workforce, which has been the impetus for some of his course choices over the last few years.

He has chosen courses that have provided new skills that he uses when interacting with people and dealing with the pragmatic problems that we all face on a day-to-day basis. As a result, he has broadened his definition of the workplace -- where once he saw the workplace more as the components of a lab, he now recognizes people as the most valuable asset to an organization and understands his contribution helps ensure the success of the entire group.

His engagement in learning opportunities offered by Continuing Studies is quite extraordinary.

He has taken courses in Clinical Trials Management, completed the Alternative Dispute Resolution program, and is completing the Professional Certificate in Project Management.

He is engaged in learning as both a learner and a teacher. Prior to moving to Canada from Mexico, he taught Physiology to medical students and in his current role provides training to graduate students and post-docs.



Learning prevents life from becoming boring, he says, adding even the most basic learning is a creative endeavour and stimulus for growth.

The motivation for learning, according to his nominators, is "to become a better person; see other aspects of life and other points of view that we can learn from and apply to our own lives."

Solano-Flores came to Canada in 1991 to complete post-doctoral work. Currently, he trains students of diverse ages and backgrounds and has been in current role for five years.

Continuing Studies has been interesting, he says, because the instructors are professionals in their respective fields.

BARBARA WHITE

Barbara White has been on a journey of learning for many years and in 2008 hopes to complete a PhD from Western. Not only has she already completed two Western degrees, she holds a diploma from Georgian College of Applied Arts and Technology.

White has audited many courses and recently took up piano despite never having studied it before.

Although connected to the French Studies Department, her

studies in Computational Linguistics are truly interdisciplinary. This is unusual, as most students study in a specific academic discipline.

David Heap, one of White's supervisors, has known her for almost all of her time at Western and her broad range of interests makes White a fascinating student.

"I first met her as an undergrad in my first year teaching at UWO (1997) when she 'accelerated' into my third-year French phonology class (having completed only half of the prerequisite, she had decided she wanted more linguistics, ASAP), and she has studied and worked with me since."

Her diverse background both academically (math, statistics, computer science, geography, before coming to French and linguistics and now back to computer science for her PhD) and professionally (municipal planning, troubled children's homes and so on) make her one of the most challenging and interesting students to deal with.

According to Heap, White always wanted to do something with numbers and words, not either one alone, which led to her current graduate work.

In nominating White, he writes: "Her studies are extremely interdisciplinary. Barbara is co-supervised by me, a linguist from French, and a computer science professor (Bob Mercer), with help from a rhetorician (Graves),

an anthropologist (Creider) and a philosopher (Stainton) and at her (successful!) PhD thesis proposal defense, we were musing that we really should get someone involved from the Master of Library and Information Science program at the Faculty of Information and Media Studies, as well as some of the science librarians at Taylor."

White believes that life is all about learning to use and develop our gifts. She has been drawn to learning to develop her gifts and drawn to people who are engaged in learning.



Johnston took the Western plunge in 2001 and enrolled in a BA program. She chose criminology because of an interest in the problems of young offenders. A second minor followed an introductory women's studies course.

"This course opened up my eyes to a lot of different issues," she says.

In fact, she credits winning an honourable mention in the Women's Caucus Essay Competition with providing the confidence to take on responsibilities such as report writing in her new position in the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic).

Now, Johnston is well into completing an undergraduate degree, and thinking about a master's degree.

Adult education has challenges, especially when workplace responsibilities are demanding -- that's certainly the case with her current position in the president's office. She has to be disciplined, is often up late and sacrifices some family time.

Still, for Johnston, adult education has so many benefits, both personal and professional.

TAMMY JOHNSTON

Tammy Johnston is someone whose life illustrates how important lifelong learning can be for realizing personal and professional goals.

Johnston graduated from Saunders Secondary School in London in 1978 after completing a traditional route for women -- the business and secretarial program. She had wanted to be an electrician and take over her father's company, but this was not seen as a real possibility for a woman at the time so Tammy secured a job in Purchasing at The University of Western Ontario.

She worked there until 1981 when she left to become a receptionist and secretary in the private sector. In 1984, her son Marc was born, and in 1986 Tammy returned to Western and a posi-

tion in the Faculty of Education. This job provided her with a great deal of informal learning, as she picked up all kinds of information about children's learning and schooling that she was able to use when dealing with her son's teachers.

It was during this period that Johnston was motivated to begin what has become a lifelong commitment to further learning. She enrolled in the Office Administration Program at Fanshawe College, balancing roles as a new mother and working outside the home with attending night classes.

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