SCF Professors: A Passion for Teaching

State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota’s (SCF) highly qualified, caring professors share a passion for teaching that shines brightest when they inspire students to reach their full potential in the classroom and beyond. Professors at SCF devote countless hours of preparation to their teaching, drawing from the intellect and varied experience of their colleagues. Here are three of their stories.

“There’s not a day that goes by that we’re not having some sort of conversation about what’s going on in the classroom,” said Danny Fuerstman, SCF political science instructor.

Fuerstman discovered his enthusiasm for teaching after earning his Master of Arts in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin and starting on a Ph.D. in Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education at Michigan State University. Realizing that his initial desire to combine an interest in politics with research of higher education was not for him, he followed a mentor’s advice and took a job as an adjunct instructor at two Midwest community colleges.

“I knew I had found my calling in the first class I taught. It was a really powerful moment because I think most of my friends and family thought I would never figure out what I wanted to do,” Fuerstman said.

His own experiences make him more understanding of students who struggle to find their niche. Fuerstman relishes the challenge of teaching students with varying levels of knowledge and interests, understanding that many of them are not political gurus. But students who are fascinated with politics benefit from Fuerstman’s first-rate coaching as members of SCF’s Model United Nations (U.N.) class that attend a conference where they represent countries by participating as delegates and drafting and sponsoring resolutions for committees. SCF’s first Model U.N. team won Honorable Mention and Best Position Paper.

Like Fuerstman, Isera Tyson, SCF language and literature professor, belongs to a distinguished lineage of faculty members who have cemented SCF’s longstanding reputation in the community for making an indelible mark on students. An SCF alum, Tyson credits her success to mentors and teachers whose influence continues to inspire her as a professor. Tyson, who in 2004 was SCF’s first African-American female to be promoted to full professor, was taught and mentored by Constine Gillyard, the first African-American male to earn the distinction at SCF.

Tyson graduated from SCF in 1980, earned her bachelor’s degree in business from Florida State University and began working for Inner City Bank. Not long after taking the job, she heeded a former professor’s advice to major in English and enter teaching even though she knew it was not a lucrative field. In 1986 Tyson came back to her alma mater as an English instructor. She earned her master’s degree in English from the University of South Florida and is working on a doctorate from Barry University.

In 1999, Tyson won the National Council of Black American Affairs Southern Region Johnnie Ruth Clarke Award for excellence in teaching. She is active in the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, one of the largest African-American women’s organizations in the world. Committed to seeing her students succeed, Tyson said, “I do not expect failure from any student, and I do not allow my students to fail.”

Dr. Joni Pirnot, SCF mathematics professor, discovered her gift for teaching and love for literature as a child when she overcame a severe speech impediment and helped younger children learn to read. Growing up, she wanted to be an author and illustrator, and she pursued her dream while studying English at New College of Florida. Then she aced a mathematics test and changed her major.

What Pirnot loves about teaching mathematics is tapping into creativity. She explains math as an art to her students, using anecdotes and life lessons to help them understand concepts that are not black or white. She gives them confidence to conquer their fears, often relating her childhood speech impediment to students’ test performance frustration.

Pirnot earned a Ph.D. in Pure Mathematics from the University of South Florida and published a book, “Two-Dimensional Automata: Shift Spaces and Recognizable Languages,” that includes concepts used in computer programming. Google and Microsoft offered her jobs on the spot when she presented at conferences in Italy and the Czech Republic. But she was not interested.

There is nothing that she would rather do more than meet 200 students each semester.

“I’m doing what I love, and it’s not about the money. It’s about getting up every day and seeing my students and knowing that I am making a difference in their lives,” Pirnot said.