

Distinguished Teacher of the Year

When Peg Downes received the 1988 Distinguished Teacher of the Year Award during graduation ceremonies last May, she thought, "Well, this is what I've worked for."



Dr. Peg Downes: I believe my zeal can convince students to learn.

For the associate professor of literature, the joy of teaching comes with knowing a student has grasped the point of an assigned passage or a classroom discussion. "Those are the small moments of recognition that bring tears to your eyes," Downes explains.

And while she admits that the public recognition was "somewhat embarrassing," she considers the award a testament to her success at "bringing little bits of light into people's minds."

Downes has worked hard at it during her eight years at UNCA. In addition to teaching a full load of literature and humanities courses, she has served as director of the university's distinctive humanities program for 2½ years and acting chairman of the literature department for one. She has also been instrumental in planning UNCA's new master of liberal studies program and will be teaching one of the first advanced degree courses next semester.

"I'm absolutely convinced of the rightness of what I do," she explains. "I don't necessarily have all the facts straight, but I believe it's better to be in light than darkness, and teaching gives me the opportunity to encourage students to learn."

"She really made me want to go to class, because she's the kind of person who truly cares about what you're doing and she adds a touch of humor to whatever she's teaching," says UNCA grad Anne May, who had Downes for several courses and is currently pursuing a master's degree in literature. "You can't go to UNCA without being touched by Peg Downes."

In addition to her professional duties, Downes and her husband Mike Peck work hard to keep up with young sons, Joe, Sam and Max.

"Teaching and family wear me out," she admits, "but I'm doing the two things I love. That's why I don't run away."

Her students and colleagues are glad she hasn't.

Dear Grandpa and Jen,
Thank you for the medal, I got it blessed at church, I was it alot, love John Doyle.