Faculty Scholarship and 'Heart Power' Take Center Stage in Inaugural Faculty Showcase

University Communications
November 2019

There are just three more opportunities to attend the inaugural Faculty Showcase, a series of weekly presentations meant to connect faculty members to each other and highlight their research and creative activity.

The presentations are Thursdays from 4-5 p.m. in the Student Union Memorial Center's Arizona Room. University staff members are also encouraged to attend.

"The series features faculty of all ranks from across campus and disciplines ranging from humanities to science to present their work, and woven throughout the series are faculty arts presentations and performances," said Tannis Gibson, interim associate vice provost for leadership and development in the Office of the Provost and associate dean of faculty affairs and inclusive excellence in the College of Fine Arts.

The series is supported by three groups - the Office of the Provost, the Regents and Distinguished Professors Council, and Arizona Arts - and began as a request from the council.

"The council exists to support faculty," said co-chair Lynn Nadel, Regents Professor Emeritus of psychology. "Among the things that faculty found lacking were insufficient celebration of our own faculty and their accomplishments as well as opportunities for social - and potentially collaboration-building - interactions with other faculty."

The presentations are 30 minutes long and are followed by a Q&A session and discussion, Gibson said.

"The idea is to create an event that is enjoyable and inspiring," Gibson said. "The lively discussion periods that follow have been equally engaging, and faculty have also found them to be an amazing networking opportunity."

So far, presentations have been on science communication in the age of fake news, innovations in brain science, the role of Jewish song writers in American musical theater, recognizing ourselves in fairy tales, and the rise of the 1918 Spanish flu.

"We often have little idea of what the person next to our office is doing, much less the person who is on the other side of campus," said professor Fenton Johnson, who is on the faculty of the creative writing program in the Department of English. "But I think the goal is to get us to realize how much brain power, and also heart power, there is on campus. I went away from each presentation with an appreciation of the diversity of thought on campus."

Johnson recalled the Oct. 10 presentation by Danny Gurwin, an associate professor in the
School of Theatre, Film and Television and co-chair of the school's acting and musical theatre division.

"He did a presentation on the Jewish roots of musical theater," Johnson said. "He advertised this was lecture in song, so I assumed he was going to play a couple CDs. In fact, he had an accompanist and sang many of the songs and did a little dancing. It was utterly charming and the very opposite of what one typically conceives as an academic presentation. Everybody wildly applauded, and I told everyone 'you missed a great show.'"

Most of the presentations are archived on the Faculty Showcase website [8].

Gurwin inspired Johnson to think about the University campus like American music: "American music is the amalgam of these various musical components. For example, the Jews brought their music from the shtetls and synagogues in the way Africans brought the instruments and rhythms of Africa," Johnson said. "It all merged into a great river of American culture. I'd like to think that a university campus would be a microcosm of this - welcoming and open and freely crossing all borders."

The next presentation, on Nov. 14, will feature Armin Sorooshian [9], professor and Distinguished Scholar of chemical and environmental engineering, who will give a talk titled "Clouds on the Horizon: An Engineering Grand Challenge in the Atmosphere." The series runs through Dec. 5 and will resume in the spring.

Speakers to date have been nominated by college deans and the Regents and Distinguished Professors Council, then selected by the organizers with the aim of generating a broadly interesting set of presenters each semester. Any faculty member can self-nominate by sending an email to the organizer, Tannis Gibson [10], explaining briefly why they would be a good choice.

"We are planning on making the series next semester as varied and captivating as it has been this first semester," Gibson said.

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