

Njoroge receives 2018 Emerson Excellence in Teaching Award for Lewis and Clark Community College

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GODFREY – English Professor Kamau Njoroge is Lewis and Clark Community College's 2018 Emerson Electric Excellence in Teaching Award recipient.

“Kamau possesses the type of courage to engage deeply with the complex field of forces in the classroom with humility and integrity,” said L&C Faculty Member Wayne Politsch. “With passion and precision, he creates a space for learning for each student. With rigor and spirit, he moves the learner to higher levels of thinking, questioning and writing. Our conversations over the years taught me more about teaching and learning than conversations with anyone else.”

After attending a workshop facilitated by the Center for Critical Thinking at Sonoma State University, Kamau, Politsch and L&C Philosophy Professor Gerald Mozur developed and taught a professional development course to Lewis and Clark instructors on teaching for critical thinking.

“In my estimation, there is no one on this campus who is more learned about education and pedagogy than Kamau,” Mozur said. “He is a genuine student of the field and applies in his classroom all that he has learned. His students recognize and respect his command of his subject matter and know they are in good hands in his classes. A dedicated and humble teacher of liberal arts. The Emerson award is well-deserved.”

Each year, the Emerson Electric Excellence in Teaching Awards recognize more than 100 educators in the St. Louis metropolitan area – from kindergarten teachers to college professors – who are examples of excellence in their field. This is the 25th year Lewis and Clark has participated in the recognition program.

“It is very important to Kamau that his students understand that writing is a process, and it is with practice that writing evolves,” said Dean of Transfer Programs Jill Lane.

In his classroom, students participate in a collaborative approach to learning, during which everyone contributes to the learning experience.

“I strive to see the potential in each student, to help them to build their academic self-confidence and to challenge them to become better writers while maintaining an honest and open relationship with them,” Njoroge said. “My goal is to help my students improve their cognitive skills, sometimes at the expense of my own free time and obligations.”

Njoroge earned his Bachelor of Arts in English and Economics from Principia College, his Master of Arts in English from Southern Illinois University Carbondale, and his Doctorate in English Education from Washington University.

“It is very satisfying to see students grappling with a new concept and watching them as they begin to understand it and put that concept into practical use as they become more confident writers,” Njoroge said. “Through problem-posing, we learn writing is an

essential skill that, like many others, can be improved with practice and by mastering some basic principles. Most students find that their approach to other courses is changed and improved after the class has ended.”

Njoroge was inspired to become a teacher by one of his instructors at Principia College, Norman Anderson.

“Dr. Anderson had a deep understanding of how the human condition is expressed in literature and really made it come alive for me,” Njoroge said. “Learning from him made me want to teach others as he taught me.”

He began his career at L&C in 1992 while finishing his graduate studies at Washington University and became a full-time instructor in 1994. He now relishes the opportunity to be both a mentor and educator for Lewis and Clark students.

“I am grateful that each semester, one or more of my students approach me to discuss a problem in school or in their lives in general,” Njoroge said. “I encourage my students to not react negatively to their mistakes, but to celebrate them. Once we make mistakes we can accept them and do better the next time. If my students ask a question I don’t have an answer for, I simply tell them the truth — that I don’t know but that I will research it. To admit a mistake is a sign of strength rather than of weakness. We cannot do that without humility.”

Seeing students take advantage of L&C’s 2+2 Communications program also makes him happy.

“Starting their education at L&C not only cuts the cost of their degree but also allows them to transition into college life, to acquire basic learning skills and to mature as adult learners,” Njoroge said.

He volunteers as a Bible educator each week in the community and serves as an elder in the Central Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Alton.

“I want to continue to learn from my students and to learn more about myself,” Njoroge said. “It is my goal in life to develop qualities that will make me a whole person. These qualities are not easy to master for there are many and sometimes they might require a lifetime to cultivate; however, with diligence and God’s help, it can be done. In the last few years, I have been working to hone the qualities of approachability, compassion and humility. I think these qualities will help me not only in my career, but also in my Bible education work in the community.”