World Languages Department Chair Wins Distinguished Teacher Award

Former teachers of Northwestern graduates to receive inaugural teaching award at commencement

By Pat Vaughan Tremmel

EVANSTON, Ill. --- Four high school teachers who have made a big difference in the lives of five Northwestern University seniors will join the soon-to-be graduates at commencement June 17. They are recipients of the inaugural Northwestern University Distinguished Secondary School Teacher Award. Each of the four teachers and each of the high schools where they teach will receive an award of $2,500.

Northwestern President Morton Schapiro’s call for nominations for the award brought dozens of essays from Northwestern seniors. The essays overwhelmingly pointed to the passion, know-how, heart and innovation of the high school teachers they nominated. Choosing among the teachers who responded to the nominations was difficult. But the video interviews with the four recipients, following readings of the essays singing their praises, confirmed the nominating committee’s choices.

University School Upper School teacher and World Languages Department Chair, Edwardo Johnson, was honored with one of the awards.

“Northwestern is rich with incredibly talented students, and so much of the credit goes to high school teachers,” Schapiro said. “We are particularly grateful to the award recipients who played such a vital role in helping shape five of our 2011 graduates.”

The Distinguished Secondary School Teacher Award is co-sponsored by the Associated Student Government and the office of the president; the selection committee is co-chaired by Josh Wasserman, a senior in the McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science, and Eugene Y. Lowe, Jr., assistant to the president and senior lecturer in religious studies. Students nominated 46 teachers, and 11 teachers were selected for interviews. The committee recommended the four winners of the award to President Schapiro.

“It has been gratifying to work with such a committed group of Northwestern students and the Associated Student Government on the selection process for this award,” Lowe said. “We shared the privilege of engaging a remarkable group of teachers who play such critical roles in the lives of students.”

About Edwardo Johnson

Johnson previously taught high school in Jamaica, where he is originally from, and in the Bahamas before joining the faculty of University School of Nova Southeastern University (Upper School) in Davie, Fla., where he serves as curriculum coordinator for world languages. One of his nominators, Alex Leibowich, who will graduate from the School of Communication, was a student in his Spanish class.

“I learned more about myself, about the people around me and about the human experience as a whole, than any language could have ever taught me,” Leibowich said. What Johnson taught, “could not be translated into Spanish or any language for that matter; it’s something you had to experience.” Beyond that, Leibowich said, “He taught us how to be proud of life – to appreciate it for everything that it is and everything that it will be, no matter what obstacles we face.”

(Johnson also was nominated by Carl Michael Blumenfeld, Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences.)