

December 23, 2014

## SHU Earns Online Learning Consortium Award

Marie Hulme, *Sacred Heart University*

## SHU Earns Online Learning Consortium Award



Professor Marie Hulme, right, accepts the OLC Effective Practice Award from Sandra Coswatte, director of the OLC Institute for Learning.

News Story: December 23, 2014

Sacred Heart University was well represented at the Online Learning Consortium International Conference 2014, held in Orlando in late October. The prestigious conference's guest-speaker roll included three SHU professors, and the university received a technology-innovation award for an app conceived and designed by its students, staff and faculty.

Antoinette Bruciati, associate professor of Teacher Education, presented on the topic of "Assessing Group Collaboration Processes in Online Courses;" Enda McGovern, associate professor of Marketing and Sport Management, covered "Apps for Active and Mobile Learning: Experimenting with FlipBoard and Stitcher;" and María Lizano DiMare, associate professor of Teacher Education, discussed "Social Networking: Group Text and Video Technology Communication Tools for Online Education."

Additionally, Linda Morrow, assistant program director for Patient Care Services Administration at SHU's School of Nursing, attended the conference as a Wiley Fellow.

SHUSquare, a Sacred Heart University-built online learning program that promotes connectivity among faculty and students, won a national education award in "Effective Practice" from the Online Learning Consortium (formerly the Sloan Consortium).

Designed to enliven teaching and learning, SHUSquare is an online community for First-Year Seminar students where they can network with faculty and develop important 21st-century skills by sharing ideas, work and resources across various disciplines and between courses. It's motto—"Keep the Conversation Going"—refers to its intent to encourage autonomous learning beyond the traditional classroom.

"It won because it's quite unique in a first-year program to have this kind of formal process for networked learning," says Jaya Kannan, SHU's director of the Office of Digital Learning.

Kannan says SHUsquare represents the kind of educational opportunity that aligns perfectly with the goals of a liberal arts university. “In an undergraduate liberal arts curriculum, the focus on critical thinking is crucial to achieving academic excellence,” she says. “SHUsquare is a very original and pedagogically sound way to go beyond the traditional approach of just staying within course. It expands students’ minds to make meaningful connections between disciplines, and it is inspiring faculty to embrace technology to enrich and enhance teaching and learning.”

The program began with a pilot in the 2012-13 academic year and quickly evolved into a networked community of nearly 20 seminars. SHUsquare now has over 50 pages of content, including videos, discussion groups and multi-modal projects and is continuing to grow each semester. Over 900 SHU students are active on the platform.

According to Marie Hulme, director of SHUsquare and a professor of English, the program was developed through a collaboration of representatives from a large swath of the Sacred Heart community—from professors in various disciplines, to computer science and technical staff and beyond. The idea for the program was originally conceived by Seamus Carey, former dean of the University’s College of Arts and Sciences, who now serves as president of Transylvania University in Kentucky.

“SHUsquare has provided a platform for encouraging multi-discipline and multi-modal teaching and learning within a networked community of thinkers, writers and communicators,” Hulme says. “It provides our students with an authentic audience as digital writers, which is an important pedagogical tool for writing-intensive courses. It is an example of the best of the Sacred Heart community working together to foster a student-centered environment of learning.”

According to its website, the Online Learning Consortium is “the leading professional organization devoted to advancing the quality of online learning worldwide. The member-sustained organization offers an extensive set of resources for professional development and institutional advancement of online learning, including original research, leading-edge instruction, best-practice publications, community-driven conferences and expert guidance. OLC members include educators, administrators, trainers and other online learning professionals, as well as educational institutions, professional societies and corporate enterprises.”