

2017 MENTORING AWARD WINNERS

Elizabeth (Libby) Otto (Art)

Specializing in European and American art and visual culture from the nineteenth century to the present, issues of gender and theory, and the history of photography, Libby Otto has been an outstanding mentor to colleagues and students alike. Her colleague Jasmina Tumbas describes her as “one of the most generous professors I have encountered at UB. Her commitment to and enthusiasm for the history and theory of art, as well as her ethical and remarkable support of students and junior faculty, has made Dr. Otto one of the most respected and treasured professors at UB.” Another colleague, Miriam Paeslak, notes that Libby’s generosity and sincerity are “driven by her curiosity, passion, openness, and deep conviction to provoke, support, and foster substantial, well-developed and ethically solid scholarly work. Her motivations seem never calculated or driven by anything but a desire to ensure that mentees reach their highest potential.”



Graduate students also benefit from Dr. Otto’s leadership role in promoting research and organizing programming at the local, national, and international levels. Catherine Dawson, for instance, notes that Dr. Otto is a vitally important source of leadership and guidance in the realms of gender equality and professional development. Libby’s exceptional work includes being: a tough editor who pushes her students to become exemplary writers; a guide and advocate in helping students locate funding for research; a champion of complexity who illuminates the power and intersectionality of race, gender, class, and sexuality; a kind person who helps students and faculty feel welcome when they arrive in Buffalo; and an attentive mentor who “bring[s] out peak intellectual performance in those she mentors”

In the words of a former student, Cori Wolff, now the Director of Public Art at ArtWorks Cincinnati, Libby excels as “a teacher and advocate for political and social justice, particularly for women. . . . She is an exceptional role model and avant garde scholar.”



Hershini Bhana Young (English)

Working in the fields of black performance studies, contemporary African diasporic literature, queer studies, and disability studies, Hershini Bhana Young has had a transformative impact on countless students and colleagues. Cris Miller, Professor and Chair of the English Department, notes: “Hershini gives intellectually, personally, and emotionally to all the students or faculty with whom she works, in ways that encourage them to do the highest quality work possible and to make the most of their opportunities at UB or in their chosen profession. Some also testify that she has helped to keep them in an institution that seemed otherwise foreign and unwelcoming to them.” Nnedi Okorafor

testifies that she might not have come to or stayed at UB had it not been for Hershini: “From the moment I met Hershini, she has been a friend and mentoring figure to me. When I first came to visit the University at Buffalo nearly three years ago Hershini was one of those who took me under her wing and showed me what made this university great.” Carrie Bramen finds two features of Hershini’s teaching and mentoring especially noteworthy: “First, she welcomes the tensions and conflicts that sexuality and race can raise; she is comfortable with controversy and contradiction, and she does not feel the need to mollify or sugarcoat challenging issues. In doing so, she models for her students a constructive way to engage with challenging material without apology. Hershini also brings to the classroom a strong emotional valence to her teaching, reminding her students that these issues are not merely intellectual exercises but have real affective consequences.”

Dozens of current and former students rave about Hershini’s impact on their lives. Aleksandra Szaniawska, for instance, describes Dr. Young as: “a true role model for me as my advisor, a teacher, a researcher, and simply as a passionate person who cares about equality and devotes all of her energies to make this world a better place. . . . She has inspired me to think big, to believe in myself, and the change I can bring about.”