EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING  WCC 1989 WINNER: NORMA HIGA

Norma Higa’s students describe her as “an excellent communicator, inspiring, positive, caring, intelligent, honest and insightful. She makes (economics) not so intimidating and brings it down to your level.”

High praise, indeed, for any teacher. But then Higa isn’t just any instructor. She is Windward Community College’s 1989 Excellence in Teaching winner.

In addition to her classes in economics, she also coordinates the Windward Transition Program at WCC, a 16-week series that helps people of all ages make changes in their lives.

Change, Higa feels, can create opportunities for growth.

“But we have to recognize that the road to self-development lies within ourselves. If you take responsibility for some of the things in life, then you are not a victim,” she explains.

Higa, who has taught at WCC since it first opened in 1972, says her own classroom style has changed over the years.

“I’m still concerned with maintaining high standards and being fair,” she emphasizes. “But I’ve come to realize that teaching is not a lock-step method. People learn in different ways and insights come at different times.

“I’ve also tried to make the students better participants in their own learning, so they take responsibility, too.”

She says the award has made her reflect on what it means to be a teacher.

“Teachers are nurturers and givers, but in order to give, you have to be able to receive. It’s a two-way street. In order for us to grow as people, there has to be a balance between the two. That is a lesson I needed to learn.”

One view which hasn’t changed is Higa’s opinion of WCC and the supportive atmosphere the college maintains.

“We’re still small enough that we feel like family,” she says, smiling. “It’s as caring a group of people as you’ll find anywhere.”

When Higa isn’t in the classroom, she says she’s either at workshops like the one she attended recently on writing across the curriculum or balancing her life with hobbies.

“I love gourmet cooking, gardening and antique collecting,” she says. “They give me the feeling of wholeness that I tell my students is important.

“The other thing I tell them is that we create our own personal maps and landmarks. Only we can decide how to measure ourselves. Success is self-confidence and commitment . . . but a dream is not enough. You also have to have a plan.”