

Jim O'Connor, CILT Director

Hi, I am Jim O'Connor, Director of the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning for the TCUS Western Division (TUC and TUN). I am beginning my fourteenth year at Touro University California. I have a background both in health sciences and teaching. I was one of the first physician assistants in the United States and assisted in thousands of surgical procedures in Ohio and Alaska. I have a bachelor's degree in Biology and Chemistry, a master's degree in College and Community Counseling, and a PhD in Cognitive Psychology specializing in teaching, learning and instruction.

Prior to coming to Touro I taught at Kenai Peninsula Community College in Homer, Alaska, and California State University Bakersfield (CSUB). I left CSUB to become a Center Fellow at the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching in the Great Smokey Mountains, where I designed interdisciplinary renewal seminars for North Carolina public school teachers. After that I spent thirteen years at the University of Iowa, teaching educational psychology courses and supervising student teachers. I also served as a sports psychologist for the Iowa Hawkeye football team.

I left Iowa to come to Touro in September of 2007. My Dad had been stationed on Mare Island during World War II, and I had always wanted to live in the San Francisco Bay Area. I came to TUC as the Associate Dean of the College of Education. I have served in the following positions at TUC: Interim Director of the Joint Physician Assistant/MPH program, Dean of the College of Education, Founding Dean of the College of Education and Health Sciences, and Interim Co-Director of the TUC IT department. Also, I served as Chair for the TUC Five-Year Strategic Action Plan in 2015.

On a personal note, I am an avid traveler, having visited 46 countries and all 50 states. I have been swimming several times a week since 1983 including hundreds of miles in San Francisco Bay. I am a member of the Dolphin Swimming and Boating Club in San Francisco. I am also an avid scuba diver having logged almost 1000 dives and reaching the status of Divemaster. I love sports, theater, music, playing friendly games of poker, movies, cooking, baking, and dogs.

I am a member of the LGBTQ community (he/him/his), and I am a strong supporter of diversity and racial equality. I am a highly flawed individual who has made tons of mistakes during my life. I thoroughly enjoy my work at Touro and love working with faculty in order to improve the learning experience for TUC and TUN students. I most value the friendships in my life, including those I have made at Touro.

Cee Harrelson, Clinical Skills Lab & Standardized Patient Program Director

Watching students partner with standardized patients in learning has always been thrilling to Cee Harrelson. While she enjoys all aspects of her role at Touro, watching those interactions will always be the best.

Cee began working with standardized patients 22 years ago at Western University in Pomona, CA. After working for many years as a Unit Clerk/Monitor Tech in ICU and many years in the performing arts, SP education was a beautiful blend of her experience. In 2005 she came north to Touro to establish a program of SP's and an OSCE Lab to deliver SP assessment encounters to COM students.

Very quickly it grew to accommodate physician assistant and pharmacy students, expanding further by adding patient encounters into teaching as well as assessment. Cee collaborates with faculty on case materials, event design and delivery. She schedules events, manages the software which runs the lab and supports the most recent expansion in 2017, a simulation suite with high fidelity human simulators. Cee graduated from Pitzer College in Claremont, CA with a BA in English, and World Literature. She returned to the theatrical stage in 2018 after a long hiatus. She plans to pick up that thread again post pandemic.

Rebecca Howard, Standardized Patient Recruiter/Trainer

Inspired by her own healthcare experiences, as well as a chance to flex latent acting muscles, Rebecca Howard came to Touro University in 2005 as one of its first Standardized Patients (SPs). In 2009, she became Touro University's Standardized Patient Trainer & Recruiter.

In this role, she has met and hired, trained, and coordinated dozens of people from Vallejo and around the Bay Area to work in the Standardized Patient Program, helping to build a bridge between Touro and nearby communities, as well as work to create and offer authentic patient experiences for Touro's students. She enjoys bringing Standardized Patients and students together to support the ideal of healthcare providers partnering and communicating humanely with those in their care. Howard also helped develop and write a handbook for SPs.

She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in journalism and mass communications from Kansas State University, and for many years worked as a feature writer, editor, proofreader and fact-checker for newspapers and other publications in Southern California. She has continued her passion for writing — and food — in her blog, "A Woman Sconed," and her monthly column, "Cooking My Way Home," for Kansas Country Living magazine, where she writes about food and memories of growing up rural. Living on Mare Island is as close to country life as any place Howard has lived in California, and she enjoys spending time in the natural beauty of the area. In addition to cooking, baking, reading, and writing, she enjoys photography, short stories, movies, lifting weights and practicing yoga.

Stephen Tessier, Clinical Skills Lab Administrative Assistant

I am the Administrative Assistant for the Clinical Skills Lab at Touro University California Campus. In this position, I work closely with the director and my coworkers providing administrative assistance. I provide support on the department budget, events, webpage, calendar, and projects.

Prior to my position at Touro, I worked in the supported services field in Marin County for individuals with Intellectual and developmental disabilities. I am from Boston, Massachusetts, where I worked in the administrative field for Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC) and Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) then as a Project Assistant at Harvard Clinical Research Institute. I joined Touro University in January of 2018.

Aaron McMath, Simulation Technician

Aaron McMath is a Simulation Operations Specialist with a background in theater, film, and video. It started when he fell naturally into stage and film acting, then slowly transitioned to the other side of the camera.

Prior to coming onboard at TU, Aaron split time between field/studio production and post-production, working as a camera operator, editor, director, studio manager, and technical director. He has directed and produced short films, trailers, music videos and local commercials, and has worked on reality shows, documentaries, and episodic web television.

One of his most recent jobs utilized the Zoom platform to integrate a video studio with cameras and switcher into a streaming talk-show with audience participation. Aaron has also worked in visual effects, and as a post-script editor for major motion pictures. He has assisted renowned directors and award-winning editors, supervised large multi-cam productions, and has spent many years working in a story-telling medium characterized by evolving methods and technologies.

He has a persistent passion for character development and narrative form, and has worked with artists, producers, actors, and technicians in many capacities. Aaron also enjoys creative writing, surfing, martial arts, and dance, and has been featured in nationwide television commercials.