



Lie to Me: Psychology Professor Maureen O'Sullivan (center) explains her research on lie detection, which is the basis for a Fox television crime drama.

USF Professor's Research Is Lies

Her waistline hasn't been as skinny as that of the actress who portrays her in Fox television's popular crime drama "Lie to Me" since she was a pre-teen, jokes USF psychology Professor Maureen O'Sullivan in her offhanded way of noting the irony of Hollywood, a place of fiction and fabrication, being captivated by her work. Still, there's no denying that it's her years of research on deception and lie detection upon which the show is based.

O'Sullivan has been researching social emotional intelligence—the ability to manage, recognize, communicate, and detect and decipher emotions in others—for more than 30 years. She and colleague Paul Ekman, professor emeritus at the University of California, San Francisco, have written dozens of articles about their findings regarding some people's uncanny ability to detect a lie using little more than simple observation and life experience.

Of almost 20,000 people that O'Sullivan and others have tested, fewer than 1 percent come close to the fictional Dr. Cal Lightman (Tim Roth), the lead character in "Lie To Me" who is loosely based on Ekman, and who is able to discover lies through micro-facial expressions, the lilt in someone's voice, or their personal ticks as part of his work on criminal investigations.

Like people in the real world, including expert lie detectors, the fictional Dr. Gillian Foster (Kelli Williams)—who is Lightman's more holistic television sidekick—has trouble detecting the same lies in her own relationships.

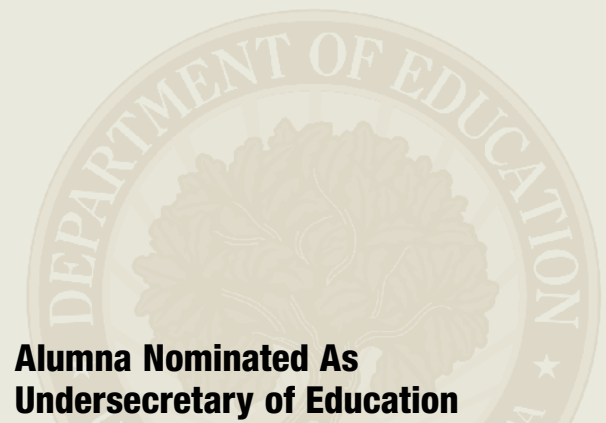
"We believe the lies we are told because we want to believe them," said O'Sullivan.

She believes the popularity of "Lie To Me" is a result of the public's attraction to what goes on in the minds and hearts of others.

And while she enjoys the show, there are many aspects, outside of her waistline, that aren't true to science, O'Sullivan said. For one, people aren't born "natural" lie detectors but have a greater or lesser capacity to learn to detect lies through working with people.

"Cops tend to do well in detecting lies about theft; therapists tend to do better detecting lies about emotion," said O'Sullivan, who is writing a book on a number of the so-called truth wizards, or lie detection experts, she has interviewed over the years.

These are people who can detect a lie at least 80 percent of the time on average by watching video of someone. "Some of these individuals are exceptional," O'Sullivan said. "They're like Olympic athletes." **USF**



Alumna Nominated As Undersecretary of Education

President Barack Obama has nominated Martha Kanter, EdD '89, for the post of U.S. undersecretary of education.

Kanter, who received her doctorate in organization and leadership, has been the chancellor of Foothill-De Anza Community College District—one of the largest community college school districts in the country—for the past six years. Prior to serving as chancellor at the Los Altos-based community college district, Kanter was president of De Anza College for 10 years. She has also worked in a variety of roles at San Jose City College.

Drawn to USF by "extraordinarily accomplished" faculty such as special education expert Susan Evans in the School of Education, Kanter credits courses like advanced statistics, educational research methodologies, and higher education law for advancing her career.

"My favorite USF memory is serving as a teaching assistant in advanced statistics for Dr. Susan Evans," Kanter said. "The graduate students challenged my knowledge at every turn and I had the opportunity to work with the best professor I've ever had in my life."

Driven by the belief that students can succeed in education and life if provided the right opportunities, Kanter has spent much of her career working to expand and improve education to lower-income students, a priority she intends to carry forward as undersecretary.

If confirmed by the U.S. Senate, Kanter's primary responsibility will be to oversee higher education.

Eye on Education: Martha Kanter, EdD '89, President Barack Obama's nominee to be undersecretary of education, speaks with USF President Stephen A. Privett, S.J., at the April 18 USF Spring Gala.

