Gladys Thum, professor at St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, was named recipient of the third annual David L. Underwood Lecture Award (1978).

She received both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Washington University. She has taught in Vietnam, Cambodia and Okinawa. She has had 9 years’ experience with the government as writer, editor, and public relations while stationed in Tokyo, Okinawa, Saigon, Vietnam, Cambodia and Washington D.C. She was appointed as an Assistant Professor in English in 1965.

The award, designed to recognize excellence in the field of education, is named for the college's former dean of instruction, David L. Underwood. It provides the recipient a $100 grant and an opportunity to present a public lecture to members of the campus and community in August.

From *St. Louis Magazine*, August 1987, p. 15:

Writer sisters are not unheard of--there are the Bronte girls, of course, and Ann Landers and Dear Abby. Add Marcella and Gladys Thum to the list. In a lifestyle reminiscent of The Odd Couple, the Thums share a tiny house in Affton where they write and often collaborate.

"Sometimes the house is not big enough for both of use," says Marcella, 61. "Even our dog and cat find it difficult to walk through all the papers in the house. My computer's in my bedroom, and Gladys has hers in the kitchen."

"The problem is that I'm a pack rat-type. I collect everything," says Gladys, 66. "And she's just the opposite."

"Sometimes when I can't stand it anymore, I go around the house and get rid of all her clutter. But the next time I turn around," Marcella says, laughing good-naturedly, "it's back again!"
"It's an aspect of being a teacher," Gladys explains. "Teachers tend to collect everything thinking that sooner or later, it'll be useful. You can tell Marcella's been a librarian. She's always picking up. Always straightening."

Both Thums have lived and worked in Europe and Asia. Even before joining the Air Transport Command of the Army Air Force in World War II, Gladys "did a bit of private flying, Piper Club-type." As an information specialist for the government, she published or broadcasted more than a thousand articles and commentaries.

Gladys, who holds a Ph.D. in English, recently retired after 20 years as an English professor at Florissant Valley Community College.

Marcella worked as a librarian and did historical public relations writing. She has published 17 books in different genres: non-fiction, Gothic and historical romance and mystery novels for young people. One of her books, Mystery at Crane's Landing, received an Edgar award from the Mystery Writers of America for best juvenile mystery, and another Exploring Black America, was awarded a Notable Book Award from the American Library Association.

"In the '60s, I enjoyed writing for adolescents," Marcella says. "Then, they began to want more realistic books, about abortion, drugs and that sort of thing. I didn't enjoy doing them anymore. I turned to other genres. It's practical to write in different fields. If one dries up, you move on to another."

The sisters have worked on three books together: The persuaders: Propaganda in War and Peace, Exploring Military America and Airlift: Story of the Military Airlift Command.

"We decided who will write what. We each take a slice. Then we get together to make it sound like on writer. Naturally each of us feels her words are the most important," Marcella confesses. "It's primarily a matter of ego, Gladys adds. "It takes time to learn to collaborate."

At present, each sister is writing alone. Marcella is working on a romance novel that takes place in Hawaii. "My heroes are always dark-haired men. That's what readers prefer. Dark, strong and tender. The heroines are strong too. They're often blonde, always pretty and must overcome adversity. My books have an element of fantasy, but I bring in a slice of history. Since sex was not as open in the 19th century, my heroines don't jump in and out of bed. I write about sensual feelings, rather than the actual act."

Gladys is working on her first novel, which is set in Cambodia. "It's mainstream fiction. It's much easier to sell in a category, like the romance. I'm taking a real gamble. But now that I have retired, I feel free to experiment."