Kriszta Kotsis, professor of art history, teaches classes on classical and medieval art and conducts research on representations of women in Roman and Byzantine art. After completing graduate school, she was enticed by the opportunity to teach at Puget Sound, where she could forge individual relationships with her students on a small campus with a tight-knit community.

Since then, Kriszta has been very active both in the Puget Sound community and beyond. She organizes conferences and workshops on campus and takes students to major exhibits in Los Angeles, Fort Worth, and elsewhere. She also helps organize events that invite Puget Sound alumni back to campus to talk with current students about their careers as museum curators, archaeologists, and professors.

Louisa Raitt ’15 participated in Kriszta’s alumni event and attributes her success in art history to the mentoring Kriszta offered on her summer research project as an undergraduate at Puget Sound. The interests she explored during that project inspired her to pursue graduate work. Recently, Louisa began working toward her Ph.D. in Art History at New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts. “I cannot speak highly enough of Kriszta,” Louisa says. “She has been my advocate, my confidante, my sounding board, my motivator, and my greatest support, not only as a professor, but as a colleague and friend. I consider it a privilege to be a product of her expert teaching and advising.”

To express her motivation for teaching, and particularly for mentoring students like Mary, Kriszta references a Hungarian poem, written by Attila József and translated by Peter Hargitai, that includes the lines:

"IT’S USELESS TO BATHE IN YOURSELF
—WASH YOUR FACE IN OTHER FACES.
AS A TINY EDGE ON A BLADE OF GRASS AND YOU’LL BE GREATER THAN THE WORLD’S AXIS."

Excerpt from 1924 poem, “I am not the one shouting” from Perched on Nothing’s Branch: Selected Poetry of Attila József, translated by Peter Hargitai, Buffalo, NY, 1999, 35.
Mary, a student originally from Memphis, Tenn., came to Puget Sound to follow her passion for art history. When she studied the famous Nike of Samothrace sculpture in an art history class as a junior in high school, she was hooked on the subject. "I fell in love," she says.

Though it was a big move for her to come across the country for college, she notes, "Being part of a small department with the ability to get plugged into the unique opportunities, especially the jobs that are created on campus for art students, has been really beneficial. It makes me feel like I can do this."

Mary's interest in Christian Byzantine art flourished in a first-year seminar, part of Puget Sound's Core Curriculum. The course, taught by Kriszta, served as a launch pad for Mary's academic pathway. "My heart got very excited in her class," Mary, now an art history major, recalls. "Kriszta's methodology for teaching is amazing. She's teaching me what art history really is. She puts words to something that I don't yet have the words for... That's why I want to be present and I want to impress her."

The respect is mutual. For Kriszta, the successes of students like Louisa and Mary, and the personal interactions that she has with art history students, are some of the most rewarding aspects of her work. "Within the Art History major, students take four or five classes with the same professor, and we develop a vested interest in them and their work. They have our complete support," she explains. "That same level of personal interaction cannot exist at a bigger school."

That personalized mentoring helps students find and secure appropriate out-of-classroom experiences. Mary has gained extensive experience working as a student curator in Kittredge Gallery, organizing a show of landscape paintings by Abby Williams Hill, and another exhibit of twentieth-century Chinese calligraphy and landscape art. In addition to her professional experiences, Mary engaged in scholarly research with Kriszta during the summer, working as a colleague with her professor. "Working with her benefited my own research and teaching," says Kriszta, noting that Mary's interest in Modigliani prompted her not only to include a new unit on intersectional analysis in the senior art history seminar, but also to explore new avenues in her own research.

"When I visited Puget Sound, I sat in on an art history class. To hear someone—especially a female figure—say 'this is something you can do' was so cool and reaffirming."

Mary Thompson '19, Memphis, Tenn.