Awards of Distinction Recognize Outstanding Teachers, Mentors

University Relations ? Communications
April 2016

Professors who demonstrate excellence in their teaching, research and mentoring were recognized at the Awards of Distinction ceremony on Monday, surrounded by co-workers, families, friends and students whose lives they have impacted.

"This Awards of Distinction ceremony is our opportunity to recognize excellence and to celebrate the outstanding accomplishments of University of Arizona faculty," said Andrew Comrie, senior vice president for academic affairs and provost, who gave opening remarks at the ceremony. "These awards acknowledge teaching and research excellence at our University."

Six professors were honored with the awards, given by the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost [1], the UA Foundation [2], the Graduate College [3] and the Honors College [4].

"All the awardees today represent the very highest of achievements in teaching at the University of Arizona and we're just so proud of the quality of our faculty and the experiences that they can give our students," Comrie said. "I really offer my heartiest congratulations to all of our award winners. These are not just little awards you give out every day. This is the real deal."

This year's Awards of Distinction recipients are:

Edward Prather, associate professor for the College of Science [5], received the Henry and Phyllis Koffler Prize in Teaching. This award is sponsored by the senior vice president for academic affairs and provost and honors individuals who have made an impact through outreach.

Prather teaches astronomy and physics while creating classroom experiences that make students want to be active in their society. He sometimes teaches classes exceeding 800 students.

"I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to spend the last 15 years in the science classroom working with thousands of wonderful UA students," read a quote from Prather in the awards program. "I have the great pleasure of doing something that I truly enjoy and the satisfaction of knowing that I am having a positive impact on the learners I care so deeply about."
Amy Graham, lecturer in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry in the College of Science, was honored with the Undergraduate STEM Education Teaching Excellence Award, given by the senior vice provost for academic affairs.

Graham engages students by using creative strategies, including tabletop whiteboards and Socrative.com, an online quizzing tool. By using these tools, Graham provides opportunities for students to apply the knowledge they have gained in gathering information. She teaches in the new Science-Engineering Library Collaborative Learning Space and trains preceptors on their role in the classroom and how to interact with students.

Anders Peterson, an instructor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, received the Margaret M. Briehl and Dennis T. Ray Five Star Faculty Award from the Honors College.

The Five Star Faculty Award was established in 1983 and is the only University-wide teaching award bestowed by undergraduates. This year, there were 188 faculty nominations, a record for the award.

Peterson is dedicated to his students and motivated to see them succeed, getting to know them individually to best meet their needs. He encourages students to combine what they learn in the classroom with community involvement. He displays excitement about both teaching and Spanish and uses that to inspire his students.

"Many years ago, I was a full-time undergraduate student who looked up to several outstanding professors, but now the roles have reversed and I am a professor that looks up to several of my undergraduate students," read a quote from Peterson in the awards program. "I strive to be the kind of educator that I would have respected deeply."

Nader Chalfoun, professor in the College of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture, and Price Fishback, professor in Eller College of Management, received the Graduate and Professional Education Teaching and Mentoring Awards.

When Chalfoun came to the UA in the 1980s, he hit the ground running with groundbreaking work in passive and alternative climate design and energy conservation. He is the longest-serving teacher in the College of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture. His teaching evaluations are among the best seen by the award review committee and his students regularly present their research at local and international conferences, publish peer-reviewed journals, and win national and international awards.

Fishback is not only a world-renowned economic historian but an inspiring teacher who has taught at every level and whose students have gone on to become faculty members themselves. Of the doctoral students whose dissertation Fishback has chaired, 19 are now tenured or tenure-track professors, two are research fellows, and four are chairs or vice presidents of major corporations. Even with his own research and lecturing, he still finds time to mentor current graduate students and stay in touch with former ones.

Hal Tharp, associate professor in the College of Engineering, received the University of Arizona Foundation Leicester and Kathryn Sherrill Creative Teaching Award, given by the UA Foundation and the GIFT Center. He has the philosophy of being student-centered, devoted to expansion of his own skills and sharing teaching ideas with others. Through this, he has gained the reputation of being an interactive and dynamic teacher.
"One word to summarize my teaching philosophy is 'conversation,'" read a quote from Tharp in the awards program. "Thinking about teaching and helping students learn, I consistently focus on how the teaching process is similar to a conversation, and I motivate my students to engage in a two-way conversation while I facilitate their learning."

Tharp also teaches summer courses to help students remain on track for graduation. He is popularly known for using humor as a way to teach.

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