Awards honor the best in teaching, research and mentorship

Eleven faculty members have been selected to receive awards in recognition of excellence in teaching, mentoring and research.

The awards, presented by the Office of the Provost, the Honors College, the Graduate College, the Postdoctoral Affairs office and the GIFT Center at the UA Foundation, were scheduled to be celebrated at the Awards of Distinction ceremony last month. That event is now expected to take place in November.

Distinguished Scholar Award

Ali Behrangi
Associate Professor, Department of Hydrology and Atmospheric Sciences

Kacey Ernst
Associate Professor, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics

Jonathan Sprinkle
Associate Professor, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering

Behrangi joined the University as an associate professor in 2018. One nominator called him a "rising star" in his department, citing his success in attracting $12 million in grants and collaborating on funded projects totaling $33 million. Another cited his work on the University's Earth Dynamics Observatory, saying Behrangi "has been critical to our efforts to elevate EDO from a vision toward a world-renowned center of excellence in multidisciplinary Earth remote sensing."

Ernst joined the University in 2008 as an infectious disease epidemiologist. She is responsible for "transforming innovations in solving environmental health problems with climate changes," according to one nominator. Another cited her success in maintaining funding for an active research program that expanded the University's global reach through work in Mexico, Kenya and Jamaica.
Sprinkle, said one nominator, has put the "University of Arizona on the map as a leader for research in cyber-physical systems and autonomy." Another praised Sprinkle's work on the CAT Vehicle program, which allows undergraduate students from around the country to spend a summer on campus and conduct research on an autonomous vehicle. He joined the University in 2007.

The award comes with $10,000 to support work within each winner's discipline.

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**Early Career Scholars Award**

**Vasiliki "Vicky" Karanikola**  
Assistant Professor, Department of Chemical and Environmental Engineering

**Ann Shivers-McNair**  
Assistant Professor, Department of English

**Caleb Simmons**  
Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies and Classics

The Early Career Scholars Award recognizes early-career faculty who are at the forefront of their disciplines and make highly valued contributions to teaching, creative activity and service.

Karanikola joined the University in August 2019. One nominator praised her research success, including designing and implementing a solar membrane distillation system on the Navajo Nation. A second nominator cited her role in developing the University's environmental engineering undergraduate program and recruiting its first class.

Since Shivers-McNair came to the University in 2017, one nominator said, "she has single-handedly built and directed an undergraduate degree program, developed exciting and innovative new courses, won major research awards, and contributed at every level to her students, her department, and her discipline at large." Another praised her research for helping develop road maps for supporting women of color and other underrepresented groups in academia.

In nominating Simmons, who came to the University in 2014, one colleague said he "began his career here by single-handedly creating an entirely new curriculum in South Asian religions, successfully proposing six new courses during his first years here." Another lauded his efforts to take student groups to India for on-site study tours.

The award includes a $5,000 prize.

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**Henry and Phyllis Koffler Prize**

**G. Dirk Mateer**  
Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics
This award, made possible by donations from late President Emeritus Henry Koffler and his wife, Phyllis, recognizes outstanding accomplishments in three categories: teaching; research, scholarship and creative activity; and public service and outreach. This year's award is for the teaching category.

Mateer joined the faculty in 2014 as the inaugural holder of the Gerald Swanson Chair in Economic Education. One nominator said Mateer wants to "change the way the world teaches economics," citing Mateer's book "Economics at the Movies," which included a companion website with 20 film clips for students and instructors to analyze. In another nomination letter, a former teaching assistant said a typical day in a class taught by Mateer includes "movie and television clips, collaborative learning, lots of cool images and many thoughtful examples."

The award includes a $10,000 prize.

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**Gerald G. Swanson Prize for Teaching Excellence**

**Susan M. Knight**  
Associate Professor of Practice, School of Journalism  
**Lisa Rezende**  
Assistant Professor of Practice, Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology  
**Robert Williams**  
Regents Professor, James E. Rogers College of Law

This new award — created through a gift from the Thomas R. Brown Foundation in honor of Gerald G. Swanson, professor emeritus of economics — recognizes excellence in undergraduate teaching.

Knight began at the University in 1991. One nominator said Knight's commitment to students stretches beyond their time in her class, saying she continues to mentor hundreds of alumni through social media, phone calls and email. A former student said Knight is "laser-focused on helping her students in any way that she can, whether it be working to negotiate new deadlines in light of family emergencies or getting them interviews that yield job opportunities."

Rezende joined the University in 2005. "As a first-generation college student, I had several questions about becoming a scientist, and Dr. Rezende guided me into researching different options and provided me great feedback in my assignments," one nominator wrote. "In all honesty, she impacted my decision of pursuing graduate education." Another nominator said Rezende's research on active learning helps inform her approach in the classroom.

Williams, who came to the University in 1986, was named a Regents Professor in 2018. One nominator wrote that Williams "is the first law professor from whom students seek guidance in applying to graduate schools, and Rob has tirelessly guided thousands of students to graduate education, including Native American students whom Rob and his Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program uniquely serve." In another nomination letter, a student said word quickly spread among the student body that Williams' courses were "must-take."

The award comes with a $5,000 prize.
University of Arizona Foundation Leicester and Kathryn Sherrill Creative Teaching Award

Joela Jacobs  
Assistant Professor, Department of German Studies

This award, presented by the University of Arizona Foundation, recognizes excellence in the art of teaching at all levels, with particular emphasis on the undergraduate level.

Jacobs joined the University in 2015. One student praised Jacobs' popular From Animation to Zombies course, saying she discussed philosophy and culture using topics ranging from the possible intelligence of plants to the film "Night of the Living Dead." Another nominator said Jacobs is "a role model of excellence to each student she interacts with and has inspired many, including myself, to follow their academic goals into higher education."

The award includes a $2,500 prize and a plaque placed in the Donna Swaim Honors Lounge in the Student Union Memorial Center.

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