2019 Teaching Excellence Awards

March 18, 2019

Seven Teaching Excellence Awards handed out at 29th Annual Engineering Awards Luncheon

The Michigan State University College of Engineering recognized demonstrated excellence and distinguished contributions during the 29th Annual Engineering Awards Luncheon in the Kellogg Center on Friday, March 15. Seven Withrow Teaching Excellence Awards were presented during the annual spring ceremony.

Each year, the departments of the College of Engineering select a faculty member to be recognized with the Withrow Award for Teaching Excellence. Selection of recipients is based primarily on nominations from students.

The 2019 Withrow Teaching Excellence Awards went to:

Christopher M. Saffron, an associate professor in the Department of Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering, is an exceptional educator with an uncommon ability to convey difficult concepts in a clear and inspiring manner. His teaching activities are focused on the area of bioenergy production and sustainability analysis, and he is the lead instructor of the BE department’s undergraduate thermodynamics course. Students praise his ability to make challenging materials understandable, using many real-world examples and applications to make learning fun. “He has an impressive knack of turning one of the most difficult courses, thermodynamics, into a comprehensible learning experience.” “I found Dr. Saffron to be a captivating lecturer. I love thermodynamics because of his teaching.” Another noted that he “…inspires us to make the world a better place.”

Robert Mark Worden, a professor and associate chair in the Department of Biomedical Engineering, is an exceptional leader in both the development of innovative curriculum and the cultivation of student success. He has developed numerous courses and labs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in the Department of Chemical Engineering
and Materials Science, and most recently led curriculum development for the new Department of Biomedical Engineering. Beyond the classroom he has developed interdisciplinary training programs in bioelectronics, biobased technologies, and bioprocessing, and has been instrumental in the development of biotechnology laboratory facilities for research and training programs. In the words of one colleague, “he is a model example of successful senior faculty - both in research and teaching junior members of the department.”

Alexandra Zevalkink, an assistant professor in the Department of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science, has quickly developed a reputation for creating a positive learning environment in her classroom in her three years at MSU. Her students value her hands-on teaching style and her passion for helping students to connect course material to real-life engineering problems, such as through demonstrations and field trips. They cited her ability to explain difficult material effectively, with one student stating, “From a teaching standpoint alone, she is incredible. I have never learned so much in a class.” She volunteers in the College’s K-12 outreach programs, leading hands-on demonstrations to nearly 150 girls (4-8th grade) during Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day and Lady Spartans summer camps.

Mahmoodul Haq, an assistant professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, may be a relatively new faculty member in the department, but he has been engaging with civil and environmental engineering students as a graduate teaching assistant and postdoctoral researcher for years. He serves as faculty advisor or co-advisor for eight doctoral students and has collaborated with undergraduate students on a dozen conference papers. He has mastered a keen understanding of how students learn and what they need to succeed. In his nomination materials, three themes were repetitively mentioned by his students: His enthusiasm in the classroom, his concern for making sure the students are learning, and his availability outside the classroom.
Sebnem Onsay, an academic specialist in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, is an inspiring teacher and mentor whose curriculum improvements actively engage students in learning. Her teaching approach is focused on both evidence-based and hands-on learning. Hands-on learning extends to participation outside the classroom, with students encouraged to participate in Hackathons, workshops, lecture series and career fairs. Students appreciate her enthusiasm and encouragement. “She teaches material in a way we are all engaged. But it is her consideration for our professional development outside of the classroom which makes her memorable. I know that the confidence she instilled in me while I was her student will impact me well beyond my time at MSU,” a student said.

Nelson Sepúlveda, an associate professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, has demonstrated exemplary dedication to education and his students in his eight years with the department. He teaches courses at both the undergraduate and graduate level and has earned a reputation as an excellent instructor. His evaluations in the Student Instructional Rating System (SIRS) forms are among the best in the department. Students commented: “Extremely engaging lectures. Couldn’t be more helpful in office hours.” “Nelson inspires students every day and really wants his students to learn the concept and to contribute to society through innovation,” and “...an amazing attitude and encourages us to get things done.”

Brian F. Feeny, a professor in the Department of Mechanical Engineering, is known equally for his approachable style and ability to clearly convey course material. Students feel comfortable coming to him with questions, and in turn receiving thoughtful answers as he shares the
knowledge that he has attained in his more than 27-year career at MSU. He is described as: “an individual who is able to detail course material so it is understandable.” “His enthusiasm is always evident because he cares about his students.” “His awesome sense of humor, which makes all of his classes interesting, is the catalyst to provide a learning environment that allows all to learn.” “This guy does really care about his students and is willing to help students even outside of the office hours.” “He works too hard to not receive this award.”

See more coverage on the 2019 recognitions:


**2019 Photo Gallery**

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