Outstanding Teaching Award – Dr. Laura R. Davis (Department of English)

Dr. Davis has taught in four different academic programs at KSU, receiving perfect evaluations in every category from every student in some courses. She has achieved national prominence in aspects of teaching as diverse as technology-enhanced teaching and including more nature in the classroom.

Her chair praises her as a pioneer in online teaching and being invested in her students’ success: “[She] is one of the only faculty members I know who independently struggled with and solved one of the most vexing problems in online teaching: the fact that online students drop in higher numbers than students in the traditional classroom. She did not solve this problem because she was asked to do so or paid to do so, or even encouraged to do so. She did it to improve her teaching, demonstrating once again her commitment to student learning.”

This success is extraordinary, especially considering the kind of content she teaches, as a colleague states: “Before talking with [her], I didn't think that teaching gender topics online was a good idea - I felt that these topics could only really be explored in depth in a face-to-face environment. [She] made me a convert. Students rave about her online classes - she is truly doing revolutionary things in her courses, and the rest of us could learn a lot from her.”

Students univocally express their profound gratitude to their mentor. One of them writes: “My experience as a student with [her] expanded, perhaps more than any other academic experience in English, my understanding of my native language as well as my skill sets to leverage that language in written and verbal forms to be successful in my college experiences and professionally as well.”

Outstanding Teaching Award – Finalist: Dr. Tyra Burton, (Department of Marketing and Professional Sales)

Dr. Tyra Burton has a long history of teaching excellence throughout her 14 years at KSU. She has engaged teaching in multiple modalities, from face to face to online courses, supervising directed study and capstone theses, and even study abroad experiences in several countries.

Her innovative practices include student blogs to foster reflection, inventive uses of technology, and High Impact Practices such as service learning.

Her teaching is very interdisciplinary, ranging from technical content to mythology in marketing, to race and gender issues in gaming.

Dr. Burton’s teaching is consistently praised. Quality Matters reviewers point out the cohesiveness of her online courses. Her chair and her colleagues, both in the Coles College of Business and outside, praise her mentoring. Her students, many of whom have found employment at top companies such as Nike, Harley-Davidson, Google, and Pinterest, recognize
her teaching as excellent, and are grateful for pushing them out of their comfort zones, using theory to open new vistas on their reality, and ultimately changing their life for the better.

**Outstanding Teaching Award – Finalist: Dr. Darina Lepadatu, (Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice)**

Dr. Darina Lepadatu has a strong record of leadership in teaching excellence. She has developed 13 courses since coming to KSU, in topics ranging from understanding the sociological “other” to research methods, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, including study abroad programs.

Her students uniformly appreciate her excellence in teaching, so much so that the most common words in her teaching evaluations are “excellent” and “outstanding.” She has been recognized as a faculty member who has made a difference in students’ lives by the Department of Career Planning and Development every year.

She has played a leadership role in teaching at KSU, by developing the institution’s first PhD program (International Conflict Management) and by co-organizing a Faculty Learning Community for the Year of Romania, for which she won an international award.

Dr. Lepadatu has documented her teaching accomplishments and produced scholarship on them, becoming the first KSU faculty member to author an article for the Chronicle of Higher Education.