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For More Information:

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Michigan Distinguished Professors of the Year Announced

Lansing, MI – Three Michigan professors who are leaders in their field and passionately dedicated to student success have been selected as this year’s Distinguished Professor of the Year Award recipients from Michigan’s 15 public universities. The awards will be presented by the Academic Affairs Officers of the Michigan Association of State Universities at the 2025 Distinguished Professor of the Year Awards program at the Lansing Center on Friday, April 11.

The Michigan Distinguished Professor of the Year award recognizes the outstanding contributions and dedication exhibited by the faculty from Michigan’s 15 public universities to the education of undergraduate students. Each university was invited to nominate a faculty member who has had a significant impact on undergraduate student learning through various activities, particularly classroom instruction, applied research, experiential learning, innovation and mentoring.

The 2025 recipients are: Dr. Adrienne Wallace of Grand Valley State University, Dr. Jaclyn Johnson of Michigan Technological University and Dr. Natalie Sampson of the University of Michigan - Dearborn.

“The recipients of this year’s Distinguished Professor of the Year Award exemplify the unwavering dedication to undergraduate education that defines Michigan’s public universities,” said MASU Chief Executive Officer Dr. Daniel Hurley. “Their innovative teaching methods, commitment to student success and contributions to both their disciplines and communities set them apart as true leaders in higher education. These professors not only shape minds in the classroom but also inspire personal and professional growth that extends far beyond campus.”

The 2025 recipients are introduced below:

Adrienne Wallace, Associate Professor of Advertising and Public Relations, Grand Valley State University

Dr. Adrienne A. Wallace is an Associate Professor and the Advertising/Public Relations Major Coordinator in the School of Communications at GVSU. Dr. Wallace has made remarkable contributions to undergraduate education, and her work, both in and out of the classroom, exemplifies the highest standards of teaching, scholarship and service. She earned her

bachelor's degree and master's degrees from GVSU, and her doctorate in public affairs, public policy, and administration from Western Michigan University

Since joining GVSU on the tenure track in 2016, Dr. Wallace has consistently demonstrated an unwavering passion for student development. She not only excels in the classroom but also deeply invests in the success and growth of her students outside of it. Dr. Wallace advises numerous student organizations and has developed strong community partnerships that enhance student learning. Her mentorship has helped students achieve academically, professionally, and personally. Dr. Wallace's teaching has earned her several prestigious awards, including the GVSU Student Life Jo Ann Litton Outstanding Advisor Award, the GVSU Alumni Association Outstanding Educator Award and the GVSU Outstanding Academic Advising and Student Services Award. Her students affectionately refer to her as their "PR Mom."

One of Dr. Wallace's greatest strengths is her commitment to individualized and experiential learning. As the advisor for GrandPR, a student-powered public relations firm, she provides students with the unique opportunity to apply classroom knowledge in a practical setting and learn essential industry skills. Her work on the annual CreateAthon, where students work on campaigns for nonprofits, highlights her commitment to hands-on learning. By developing service-learning projects and community partnerships, Dr. Wallace has ensured that her students receive practical exposure to the fields of advertising and public relations, while also honing their leadership, communication and teamwork skills.

An accomplished scholar, Dr. Wallace has co-authored numerous books, articles, and chapters, plus she regularly presents at major academic conferences. She has authored, co-authored and co-edited significant collections on social media and contemporary public relations. Her publications have earned national recognition, including the 2024 National Communications Association (NCA) PRIDE Outstanding Book of the Year Award. She received the 2022 NCA SPARK Innovation in Teaching Award, a testament to her ability to push the boundaries of traditional teaching methods.

Dr. Wallace also serves as Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Public Relations Education (JPRE), Vice Head of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) Internships & Careers Interest Group and Chair of the Professional Freedom & Responsibility Committee for the Public Relations Division of AEJMC. She is the past-president of the West Michigan chapter of the Public Relations Society of America (WMPRSA) and serves as the research committee Co-Chair of the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE). Through these roles, she has made significant contributions to the field of public relations.

"Dr. Wallace's leadership capacity, professional development and extensive contributions to undergraduate education make her a tremendous asset to GVSU," said Dr. Jennifer Drake, Acting Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs. "Her innovative teaching methods, exceptional scholarship and commitment to student success demonstrate her dedication to excellence in education. I have no doubt that Dr. Wallace will continue to inspire and lead in meaningful ways."

**Jaclyn Johnson, Teaching Professor of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering,
Michigan Technological University**

Dr. Jaclyn Johnson is a Teaching Professor in Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering at MTU. An exceptional educator who has taught thousands of engineers the art and joy of mechanical engineering, she has developed and implemented dynamic and interactive learning tools and approaches in her classes, the institution and greater MTU community. Whether in class or extracurriculars, Dr. Johnson is an extremely effective and innovative professor and role model. She received her bachelor's degree from Illinois Wesleyan University and both her master's degree and doctorate in mechanical engineering from MTU.

Dr. Johnson delivers excellence in undergraduate education in both quantity and quality. She teaches a remarkably diverse range of courses (twenty unique courses over the last ten years), developing and implementing courses across the entire curriculum. This depth of knowledge provides discipline and curricular insight that is rare, and she brings this insight and context to every course she teaches. She capitalizes on her broad yet deep understanding of her discipline to design learning activities and equipment that foster hands-on intellectual inquiry.

For example, in a practice-based learning course for second year mechanical engineering students, she developed a dynamic Ferris Wheel. This tool allows students to understand real-time system behavior and controller requirements under various loads, with both experimental hardware and simulation. In another project for this course, students adapt an air handling unit to precisely deliver air to a neonatal intensive care unit. Facilitating learning by linking hands-on observations to engineering theory, while solving real-world engineering design problems, is an effective and innovative learning approach that Dr. Johnson has mastered and published on.

Dr. Johnson has been recognized by a range of teaching awards at MTU, including Mechanical Engineering Teacher of the Year and selection to the MTU Deans Teaching Showcase. She is frequently recognized by the Provost for being in the top 10% of student evaluations of faculty.

Dr. Johnson seeks to educate and inspire the next generation of engineers as part of her teaching philosophy, which is achieved in her extensive contributions training students outside the classroom and in the community. As Faculty Advisor for the Michigan Tech Engineering Ambassadors program, she has grown the program from four ambassadors to a dedicated team of 30 who regularly reach over 1,000 K-12 students per semester. She also serves as Faculty Advisor to the Society of Women Engineers, where she facilitates students' professional development, and leads their Campus & Community Committee facilitating K-12 outreach. Dr. Johnson uses her leadership roles in these organizations to amplify the number and breadth of students at local and regional schools that participate in hands-on activities, exciting and educating them about engineering. Most notably, she spearheaded K-5 Engineering Day events which bring hands-on engineering to three local schools and upwards of 600 students per year.

"Dr. Johnson's dedication is not simply to teaching, but to inspiring those she teaches, and this is the hallmark of an educator that is dedicated to fostering growth – educationally, professionally, and personally," said Dr. Andrew J. Storer, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs. "Her drive to inspire and foster growth across all aspects of her many and varied educational activities makes her ideally suited for this prestigious award."

Natalie Sampson, Associate Professor of Health and Human Services, University of Michigan - Dearborn

Dr. Natalie Sampson, Associate Professor of Health and Human Services, will be promoted to full professor in May 2025 upon approval by the U-M Board of Regents. Professor Sampson's commitment to undergraduate education and thoughtful attention to pedagogy is extraordinary. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan, her master's degree from Portland State University, and her doctorate in health behavior and health education from the University of Michigan. She regularly teaches courses on timely topics including Community Organizing for Health and Introduction to Environmental Health. Beyond these core courses, she has developed new courses in order to prepare students for the many health challenges that we currently face. Of note is a study abroad in Gdańsk, Poland that took place in the summer of 2023, where students met local experts to study air pollution modeling, urban planning, and environmental law.

Dr. Sampson exemplifies the attributes of both an exceptional researcher and an outstanding and committed educator. Her focus on community engagement permeates all aspects of her scholarly work. She is a champion for public health and ensures students in her classes are matched with peers and organizations based on their own interests. As evidence, recent partnerships with the Dearborn Department of Public Health, Dearborn's Green Schoolyards Initiative and Concerned Residents of South Dearborn have all enabled UM-Dearborn students to see public health issues up close and in person.

Dr. Sampson teaches her students to design impactful, real-world materials such as fact sheets, op-eds or letters-to-the-editor that can be included in their professional portfolios. This allows many first-generation students a chance to pursue their passion while building skills for future employment. She is also a dedicated advocate for scientific literacy, teaching her students to find credible resources, to analyze case studies and to understand limitations of various public health methodologies. Her colleagues often note that her students carry and cite their knowledge about environmental justice in subsequent courses.

Outside the classroom, she supports students through her supervision of multiple capstone projects as well as service on graduate theses committees. Dr. Sampson is actively engaged in mentoring undergraduates in her research and she has supported more than 25 students through her multidisciplinary research grants. As evidence of her success obtaining funding, in the last two years she has secured more than \$300,000 in community-based funding and she also serves on a \$3.5 million dollar NIH grant. Additionally, she has co-authored peer reviewed articles with 13 undergraduates and even one high school student.

"Professor Sampson is a passionate educator and a distinguished scholar who has dedicated much of her career to creating transformative opportunities for students in public health at the University of Michigan-Dearborn," said Dr. Gabriella Scarlatta, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. "Her achievements are well deserving of the Michigan Distinguished Professor of the Year Award."

The other nominees for the 2025 Distinguished Professor of the Year Award were:

Central Michigan University – Jordan Watts
Eastern Michigan University – Amanda Maher
Ferris State University – Becky Johnson-Himes
Lake Superior State University – H. Russell Searight
Northern Michigan University – Diana Lafferty

Oakland University – Sarah Hosch
Saginaw Valley State University - Daniel Gates
University of Michigan – Shelly Schreier
University of Michigan-Flint – Gregory Laurence
Wayne State University – Donna Kashian
Western Michigan University – David Rudge

A photo of each award winner is available at [this link](#).

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About MASU

The Michigan Association of State Universities serves as the coordinating board for Michigan's 15 public universities, providing advocacy and fostering policy to maximize the collective value these institutions provide in serving the public interest and the State of Michigan.