



2022-2023

PROFILES *in* EXCELLENCE



The Office of Academic Affairs annually presents Outstanding Faculty Awards for Excellent work in Teaching, Research, Service, and Advising. The honorees are nominated by their colleagues and students and honored at the annual Awards Gala.

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OUTSTANDING TEACHING

Dr. J. Doug Barrett, Department Chair and Professor in Finance, Economics and Data Analytics in the Sanders College of Business and Technology as well as the Director for the Institute for Innovation and Economic Development, is the 2023 winner of the Dr. Lawrence J. Nelson Outstanding Teaching Award.

Here he is in his own words.

Q: What, or who, inspired your love of teaching, and when did you know this would be your career calling?

A: Students are at an important period of their lives when they are in the university. Having the opportunity to have positive impacts on them is a privilege. I began to appreciate this during my undergraduate study at the University of Montevallo.

I “knew” being a professor was what I wanted to do by my second year of undergraduate classes. Several undergraduate professors were my initial inspiration. I want to give all of them mention: Dr. Angela Hernandez (Calculus II), Dr. George Hung (three Chemistry courses), Dr. Sid Vance (English Composition II), Dr. Joe Walker (Microeconomics), and Dr. Frank Ryerson (Accounting I and Cost Accounting). Additionally, Dr. Dallas Blevins was my primary undergraduate mentor. He instilled a sense of the symbiotic relationship between teaching and research, as well as the importance of appreciating students as people.

During my graduate years, Drs. Edward Mansfield, Michael Conerly, Brian Gray, Subhabrata Chakraborti, and William Woodall (my dissertation advisor) were excellent models for different teaching styles. That said, you have to take the best of others and try to find a way to integrate it into your own style. It is challenging, but having these great role models helped immensely.

Q: Your students would not call your courses “easy,” yet you consistently receive high marks on their evaluations. What is your secret to being an approachable and highly effective teacher?

A: Understanding and respecting people is fundamental to being effective in any leadership role. In the end, leadership is a critical component of teaching. Students need to be challenged while feeling supported in their journeys. When they are aware of this support, they naturally feel free to approach you. This goes beyond office hours. All of the best professors I have known over the years have had open doors and a welcoming atmosphere for students.

Q: Those who nominated you for the Dr. Lawrence J. Nelson Outstanding Teaching Award mention your commitment to innovation and your love of learning. With more than 25 years of your career spent at UNA, tell me how you maintain this, and what keeps you excited about teaching.

A: Our students deserve a unique experience here at UNA. We can provide that by offering knowledge and skill building that most schools do not. Being willing to experiment with different approaches without fear of failure is the key to innovation. Some things work better than others, but the process of keeping fresh is crucial. Professional development also is critical, as adding new tools/methods enhances the learning environment. It is hard to help others appreciate learning without being an example. Like most faculty, I am curious about many things that may or may not be directly part of my disciplines. Finding ways to connect seemingly disparate concepts/fields is a challenge that drives much of my investigation. Nothing is more exciting than waking up and realizing you have the gift of another day to grow and share new things with students.

Q: Tell me about your work for the Institute for Innovation and Economic Development and the Agile Strategy Lab. These are non-teaching opportunities, so how does your involvement in them inform your role in the classroom?

A: Some of the work with the Institute and ASL actually does involve teaching. Ms. Mary Marshall VanSant and I teach the Strategic Doing certification course for practitioners through the Center for Learning and Professional Development. The work we do in community and economic development using Strategic Doing (through our Shoals Shift initiative) helps us continue to improve the course. In addition, I have incorporated Strategic Doing and Foresight (a tool I learned about through Shoals Shift) into our MBA and EDDBA programs.

In general, the projects with community clients/partners offer real-world applications that provide rich illustrations in class. This is both within and beyond the Institute work.

Q: Finally, you have enjoyed a long and successful career at UNA. What does it mean to you to win this award?

A: To say the least, I have been blessed at this institution in many ways. I previously received the Academic Affairs Award for Research and Scholarship in 2007 and the Academic Affairs Award for Service in 2017. Both of those were/are special. This one is especially meaningful for two reasons.

The first reason is the role of teaching at UNA as our primary mission. This does not diminish the functions of scholarship or service, as they help support teaching. That said, teaching is at the center of everything we do. This recognition is humbling.

The second reason is that the award bears the name of my late friend and colleague Dr. Larry Nelson. Anyone who knew Larry instantly realized how much he cared for teaching the students at UNA. He also was the epitome of a lifelong scholar. It is an honor to join great colleagues like last year’s recipient, Dr. Andrea Hunt, in sharing the legacy of Larry’s shining example.



Dr. J. Doug Barrett

OUTSTANDING RESEARCH

Dr. Hunter S. Waldman is an Assistant Professor in Exercise Science. He is the recipient of the 2023 Academic Affairs Outstanding Research – Faculty Award.

Here he is in his own words:

Q: What led you to your career and interest in kinesiology, and how did earning your M.S. at UNA set the stage for your return to the institution as an Assistant Professor?

A: Initially, I was a History major during my undergraduate years at UNA. I was also a student-athlete during those years. During my sophomore year, I went in for a routine physical and was told that I had elevated blood pressure and would need to be put on medication at the age of 21. I am somewhat obsessive about topics that interest me and from that moment on, I went down an exercise and nutrition rabbit hole in an attempt to understand what was going on. I changed my major over to Exercise Science and never looked back. I went on to earn both my bachelor's and master's at UNA in this field prior to pursuing my PhD in Exercise Physiology. During my M.S., I served the department primarily in a research assistant capacity and was involved in numerous studies under the mentorship of Dr. Eric O'Neal. It was during this time that I was able to start grasping the importance of research not only as a student, but from a faculty perspective. (The ability to mentor students outside of the classroom and develop their critical thinking skills, not to mention learning how to balance those projects amongst teaching and service.) Once I returned to UNA, I understood what was required and expected of Kinesiology faculty from a teaching/research perspective, and now serve in this role alongside my colleagues, including Dr. O'Neal.

Q: What have been among your most rewarding research moments?

A: I think any terminal degree holder would be lying if they did not immediately think of the day they successfully defended their dissertation. All those years of school to lead up to this single moment in time which is simply pass or fail. This aside, two moments stick out. The first was when my first undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students each published their first study as first author. Seeing my students publish their research is beyond rewarding and greater than any feeling I have ever gotten for publishing my own research. Second was recently, when a researcher that is extremely well-known in my field contacted me for assistance with his own research in exchange for co-authorship. This felt like a defining moment in my career – that my work was finally starting to pay off and, hopefully, make an impact in the field.

Q: You often shepherd students through the process of having their research published. How does this inform your own research and research process, and would you share some of

your proudest moments with your students?

A: For sure. One of my favorite quotes is: "Would you rather be a consumer of knowledge or a producer of knowledge?" There is something special about seeing a student really understand for the first time, what the research process is, and grasping for the first time that research is really as simple as asking a question, testing it, and making educated guesses based on the findings. Bringing students into the lab and observing the scientific process take place, explaining the rationale behind our experiments and what we think we may find, all allows for that "ah-ha" moment to click. They understand that anyone can produce knowledge, right here in our very own lab at UNA, and go beyond just consuming what a textbook might tell us. For me, that is what makes research so rewarding, and, because I know this is going to happen with each project, I always build into the design an hierarchy of data collection steps/techniques that rank along an "importance" spectrum. So, an undergraduate may collect something as simple as heart rate during exercise for one of our subjects; a master's student may be running our metabolic cart during a trial; and the doctoral student may be overseeing all helpers to ensure the trial is running accordingly. Regardless of the technique spectrum though, everyone is able to take ownership of their part of the project, which brings the group together because we are all working towards the same mission – a successful research study.

Q: How does your professional research intersect with your outside hobbies and interests?

A: Oh, it absolutely intersects. My wife and I are avid outdoors people and always looking for a physical challenge. (In October, we are completing our first 10k Spartan Race together.) I have always believed from that in order to best serve others, my community, and my family, I physically have to be the best version of myself that I can be. This is primarily accomplished through exercise and nutrition. I have also found quite a mental benefit from regularly training in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu as well, which then benefits those around me, including my students and colleagues.

Q: Finally, tell me what winning the Outstanding Faculty Research Award means to you.

A: Well, it is truly an honor to receive, and I am humbled to be acknowledged by my colleagues on campus. One quick look at the list of past recipients, and you immediately get imposter syndrome. However, what is most gratifying was accepting this award on behalf of all the colleagues, mentors, and students that have been willing to work alongside me on this journey. I am under no impression that this award was solely mine. Research is always a team effort, and there is not a single project I have ever completed that I didn't have a mass of helpers assisting in the project as well. While I accepted the award, this award represents everyone and is a gentle daily reminder that: "If you want to go fast, go alone, but, if you want to go far, go together."

Dr. Hunter S. Waldman



OUTSTANDING SERVICE

Dr. Gary Padgett is a Teaching, Learning, and Leadership Professor in the College of Education and Human Sciences. He is the 2023 recipient of the Outstanding Service – Faculty Academic Affairs Award.

Here he is in his own words.

Q: Your service brings your academic passion alongside your passion for ecopedagogy – being outdoors, in the garden, and inspiring growth. Tell me how these ideals came together and the benefits you and your students have experienced as a result.

A: My grandfather inspired my passion for service, education, and being outside. I credit him with my green thumb and for always stressing the importance of doing well in school. My grandfather served his community in the Navy and at church, and his example spoke louder than many people's words. When my children were born, my grandfather's example became more important. As an educator, I have the ability to effect the changes I would like to see. When I leave this world, I want to leave it to my children better than I found it – socially, environmentally, etc. With this vision in mind, I work with undergraduate and graduate students to collaborate with our stakeholders to create a better world.

Q: How would you say these experiences have changed or helped evolve your philosophy on teaching and learning, especially from your students with whom you most often interact?

A: I employ a community-based approach to my teaching, my research, and, more importantly, my service. These community-based interactions have helped my philosophy evolve over time as the wants and needs of the community have changed. As I mature personally and professionally, I have learned the importance of community. My students have been an instrumental part of this evolution, and I am grateful for their continued support and feedback. The students I have worked with are service-minded, and this does not end with their graduation. Many of them continue to work with me as they enter their professional careers to provide services to their K-12 students and to act as mentors for my undergraduate students.

Q: Those who nominated you mentioned your servant's heart, your vision, and your dedication. What would you say service looks like to you?

A: When I think of service, I think of service to all. This is a concept that can become complicated as we disaggregate data into categories. Rather than create a world that is divided, I want to create a pathway that allows everyone to work together. My search for this path was inspired by my time spent outdoors – we share this planet and can use that to develop common goals. My approach is shaped by Paulo Freire, who wrote about ecopedagogy before his death. Ecopedagogy expands on Paulo Freire's earlier works and incorporates the idea that service to people has to include service to the world in which they live. I also incorporate permaculture principles into my service philosophy, which builds on Earth Care, People Care, and Fair Share. Ultimately, I believe my acts of service should benefit all living things.

Q: Diversity and inclusion and opportunities for engagement around diversity and inclusion are important to you. How have you incorporated these ideals into your service?

A: It is important for me to create opportunities for my students to interact with people who may appear different from them on the surface. My favorite opportunities have been those associated with the Badge of Diversity and Inclusion. In order to earn this badge, students in my department must document their experiences and training in urban, rural, and/or international schools. People tend to fear what they do not understand, and we cannot understand people we do not know. In order to foster this dialogue between different communities, I have traveled with students to Florida, Oklahoma, Missouri, and everywhere in between! As part of this program, students are able to learn about the people they are traveling with and the communities they are visiting. They bring back a better understanding of what everyone has in common and an appreciation for what makes us different.

Q: Tell me what winning this award means to you.

A: I am very grateful for this award! This award, to me, symbolizes the hard work so many people and communities have invested in these initiatives. I am honored to accept this award and to continue to serve my community.



Dr. Gary Padgett

OUTSTANDING ADVISING

Dr. Ashley Johnson an Associate Professor in the Department of Mathematics, has been awarded the 2023 Outstanding Advising – Faculty Award by the Division of Academic Affairs.

Here she is in her own words:

Q: What drew you to mathematics as a student, and then what led to your decision to teach at the higher education level?

A: I've always been mathematically minded. I have a brother three years older than I am who liked to teach me what he was learning growing up. I also had great teachers in middle and high school who made learning math fun, and, for most of my life, I knew I wanted to teach math. When I got into college, I loved the challenge that my upper-level mathematics courses presented. I knew I wanted to be a lifelong student, and so on to graduate school I went. It's definitely been the right choice for me.

Q: Tell me about some of your proudest moments as a professor and then working with your students on research projects or traveling with them.

A: There are so many. First of all, I am always beaming with pride at graduation. Math is a tough major, and I am so impressed with the determination that our students display. I enjoy discussing graduate programs and summer programs with students, and I am very excited when they apply and get accepted into those. Additionally, many of my proudest moments involve alumni and former students. There is no feeling quite like getting an email or text from a former student telling me that they just used something I taught them or that they accomplished something and wanted to share that with me.

I was fortunate as an undergraduate student to have a mentor encourage me to go to conferences and to do research. Just due to the vast nature of mathematics, undergraduate students see such a small portion of what mathematics really is. I love taking students to conferences, especially where other undergraduate students are speaking, so that they can see what else is out there and that students just like them are working on these kinds of problems, so they could, too.

Q: You indicate that you enjoy being an advisor because you get to help students plan their career goals. Was there an individual

or experience that provided that for you as an undergrad or later in your academic career?

A: Well, as I mentioned earlier, I had my heart set on being a professor pretty early, so I didn't really need career guidance in that sense. However, I did have a couple of mentors throughout my undergraduate and graduate career who helped me kind of hone in on what type of academic job I wanted. Many of our students major in math because they enjoy it and can excel at it, but they don't really know a lot about what they can do with it. I consider it part of my job as an advisor to help them reflect on their strengths and likes and dislikes and find something they'll enjoy doing.

Q: I love how you describe your role as more than an 'academic advisor.' You describe yourself as a cheerleader, a pep talk giver, and, my favorite, a snack provider and warm beverage maker. Why go to these lengths, and how does this additional effort matter to you and, especially, to your students?

A: Students are often spread really thin during the semester. They're taking four or five classes, often working 20 hours a week, they have who knows why personal things going on, and you never entirely know what they're going through at any given time. I'll have students come in for other things (office hours, advising appointments, just to chat) and mention that they haven't eaten that day, so they get handed my box of snacks. Others just want somewhere to sit for a moment after taking an exam that they feel didn't go well, and they get a pep talk. And probably also some candy. Many of these students are away from their families for the first time, and it helps to have someone looking out for you. I had these kinds of people in both my undergraduate and graduate journeys who were always checking in on me, and I'm just trying to pay it forward. You'd have to ask the students what it means to them, but I do get a lot of hugs from parents at graduation, so I think it definitely doesn't go unnoticed.

Q: Tell me what winning this award means to you.

A: It is an honor to be recognized by the University for this part of my job that I put so much thought and effort into. I have had numerous alumni reach out to congratulate me and remind me how much my support meant to them while they were at UNA, and the fact that I made a positive impact on their lives during their time here is the true reward.





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