



2023 - 2024

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. Nikki Davenport** is an assistant Professor of Nursing in the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions. She is the 2023-2024 recipient of the Lawrence J. Nelson Award for Teaching by Faculty.

Here she is in her own words.

**Q:** What excites you about getting up each day, coming to UNA, and teaching?

**A:** I love teaching at the University of North Alabama! The other educators are outstanding, and there is a feeling of family when you come to the UNA campus. The sensation of family when I first arrived at the UNA campus drew me in and inspired me to teach at this university. It is truly remarkable to come to work and not only love your job but also love where you work. I feel very blessed to have obtained my position! I hope the students entering the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions feel how excited all the faculty are to welcome and education them in their chosen healthcare field. Overall, the education of future generations of nurses with my colleagues excites me the most when I come to UNA each day!

**Q:** Your student evaluations speak volumes; you are noted as "amazing" and "excellent." Tell me about teaching and what led you to this role?

**A:** Education has always been an area of interest to me. I initially began my undergraduate career as an early childhood education major and was close to completing the degree when I changed my major to nursing. The change in my major was not something I took lightly. My grandmother suffered a stroke, and the nurses who cared for her were phenomenal. They educated her and our family while also demonstrating compassion and empathy. After her discharge from the hospital, the nurse practitioner she completed her follow-up visit with was extraordinary. These nurses inspired me through the care they provided, their compassion, and their teaching. I wanted to major in nursing but did not believe I could for various reasons when beginning my undergraduate career. After this experience, I realized that nursing was not only something I could do but that this was my calling.

Nurses teach each day in their chosen areas of the healthcare profession. We teach the clients who enter healthcare often on one of the worst days of their lives. We educate newly hired nurses fresh from passing their national certification exam and seasoned nurses who are changing roles in the healthcare arena. As nurses, we often do not think about the impact of education on those around us, but it can, indeed, be one of the most positive influences you can have on another individual. It can change their trajectory in life.

I knew that I not only desired to care for our community following graduation, but I also aspired to create a positive impact on the education of nursing students. I believe that is one of the best ways to give back to the profession I love so much is through the education of future generations of nursing students. I hope that, with each passing semester, I have inspired students in the courses I teach to be compassionate and provide care that goes above what is required. I hope that I help them to realize the positive difference they can have in their chosen area of healthcare and how that mindset can influence others to be a positive change as well.

**Q:** Nursing is arguably among the most challenging of professions. How do you encourage future nurses and healthcare workers as they enter the field?

**A:** I agree that nursing can be one of the most challenging professions; however, it is also one of the most rewarding. I strive to ensure that the students in my classes understand how rewarding the profession truly is and what an honor it is to be entrusted with the care of someone's loved one. I provide real-world examples from my nursing career as I teach. I have found that providing these examples assists students in changing their mindset from one that only learns the material for the exam to one that wants to learn so they can apply the knowledge after graduation. I am never more excited than when a student contacts me after graduation to tell me that the course has benefited them in the care of clients. I hope every student leaves my courses understanding that, in their nursing career, they should care for all clients as if they are their family members because they person in the hospital bed is someone's mother, father, sister, brother, son, or daughter.

**Q:** How do you see the healthcare field shifting, and how does that affect you in your role as a nursing educator?

**A:** The healthcare field is always evolving. Every year, there are more professional advances and a deeper understanding of disease processes, evidence-based treatments, and holistic care. Nursing is a career in which you must commit to being a life-long learner. I find this constant advancement to be one of the most interesting aspects of the nursing professions because I not only enjoy teaching, but I also enjoy learning. Since being at UNA, I have completed my doctoral degree and the Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner post-master certification program. Both achievements allow me to be a more effective educator and to pursue research interests to advance the nursing profession. As an educator, I can raise mental health awareness and facilitate changes in practices.

Additionally, the nursing shortage, which continues globally, also affects my role as an educator. I hope that, through my actions, I encourage others to enter this valued profession and promote positive changes in healthcare. I am very blessed to have the opportunity to impact students' knowledge of effective care and advocate for positive change.

**Q:** Finally, what does it mean to you to receive the Lawrence J. Nelson Award for Outstanding Teaching by Faculty?

**A:** This is possibly the most difficult answer to place into words. I cannot express how appreciative and humbled I am to know that I was nominated (for) and received the Lawrence J. Nelson Award for Outstanding Teaching by Faculty. The University of North Alabama is filled with amazing faculty members, and I am blessed to have the opportunity to work with these educators. The recognition of my teaching abilities by peers, students, and the institution is an incredible honor that I do not take lightly. Teaching is not just a profession for me; it's a passion, and I never anticipated receiving an award for something I love so much. I will continue to adapt to the evolving needs of not only the students but also the healthcare profession and remain dedicated to the mission of educating the future generation of nursing professionals. I would like to thank everyone so much for this prestigious award!



**Dr. Nikki Davenport**

# OUTSTANDING RESEARCH

**Dr. John Parnell** is an Eminent Scholar of Business as well as a Management Professor in the Sanders College of Business and Technology. He is the 2023-2024 recipient of the Jim Couch Outstanding Research by Faculty award.

Here he is in his own words:

**Q: Why is research such a vital part of academics and your work at UNA?**

**A:** Excellence in the classroom is central to the UNA mission. It starts with knowing one's discipline well, but the best professors are current in their disciplines, intellectually curious, collaborative, open to new ideas, and can relate their expertise to students. Active scholarship supported by a culture of inquiry can make good classroom instructors even better. Research helps professors distinguish between fads and trends. In turn, they can help our students see the complex business world more clearly.

**Q: Tell me about the monthly faculty research series and what led to the creation and implementation of it as part of the Research Task Force?\***

**A:** The Sanders College of Business Research Task Force meets monthly to discuss ways to enhance the research culture. It supports campus speakers, vets internal research grant applications, evaluates library research databases, and examines other ideas from administrators and colleagues to promote scholarship. The RTF helps the College address issues outside the traditional purviews of departments and standing committees.

The RTF also oversees several faculty research seminars each semester. Each seminar provides a supporting venue for two or more professors to share their completed and ongoing research. They always include lively discussion and ideas for future research.

**Q: Even before your tenure at UNA as an Eminent Scholar of Business began in 2019, research was at the forefront of your work and career. Share with me some of your findings.**

**A:** I have been an active strategic management scholar since

the 1990s. I have published various journal articles and two current textbooks, *Strategic Management: Theory and Practice* and *Strategic Crisis Management*. My research focuses on nonmarket strategy (NMS) and crisis management. NMS includes firm activity beyond the traditional functions like production, sales, and finance. I am interested in why many companies spend considerable resources in the political and social arenas by lobbying, engaging with regulators, and promoting social causes. In the U.S., NMS is more common in large firms and is often inseparable from their overall strategies.

Crisis management is a common topic in the business news. Recent examples in large firms include Silicon Valley Bank's collapse, crypto entrepreneur Sam Bankman-Fried's intricate fraud scheme, and Boeing's ongoing production and safety issues with the 737 MAX aircraft. My research suggests that small companies are particularly vulnerable to crises because they lack the training and expertise to plan and prepare for a crisis. A fire can destroy a small manufacturer, and a single case of food poisoning can decimate a restaurant. A widespread crisis like COVID-19 affected all types of organizations but hurt small businesses the most.

**Q: You have been at the forefront of working with the EDDBA students as they complete their dissertations. What research is coming out of this group, and how are you sharing your expertise with them?**

**A:** Our EDDBA students are working on many exciting projects, such as the career aspirations of rural youth, job prospects for individuals with criminal records, sales force turnover, and the role of cultural intelligence in global business. I share my research expertise with students in the classroom, on dissertation committees, and in ad hoc seminars. It's gratifying to help experienced practitioners carry out rigorous and relevant research projects with scholarly and applied impact.

**Q: What does it mean to you to receive the Jim Couch Outstanding Research by Faculty award?**

**A:** Dr. Jim Couch was a dedicated and acclaimed scholar at UNA. The award is named in his memory because he contributed so much to the institution. I have gotten to know many recent recipients; their work is impressive. It is an honor to be included in this group and help UNA pursue research excellence.



**Dr. John Parnell**

# OUTSTANDING SERVICE

**Dr. Michael Pretes** is a Professor and Chair of the Department of Geoscience in the College of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering. He is the 2023-2024 recipient of the Outstanding Service by Faculty award.

Here he is in his own words.

**Q: It is difficult to characterize your service to your discipline, so I'm curious about what drives you to serve.**

**A:** Academia is a community that functions through interaction. Some of this is informal, but some is institutionalized in professional organizations and societies, and those need volunteers to serve in various capacities. Academic societies promote the discipline and provide opportunities for students and faculty to interact and exchange ideas. Serving as an officer or on a committee is a great way to advance the discipline, learn more about it, and meet a lot of people. And it can also be quite fun! I encourage readers of this to volunteer for something!

**Q: You are a first-generation college graduate; how was this encouraged your success and, what, if anything, have you had to overcome along the way?**

**A:** I was a first-generation student at a time (early 1980s) when there were not a lot of support services on university campuses. I had to make my own way and figure things out by myself, so that built confidence and helped me learn to navigate complex organizations. Neither of my parents attended college, and English was a second language for both of them, so they did not know what semesters or final exams were, and I had to explain that to them.

**Q: What prompted your love of geography? And when did you realize that it was going to be your educational and lifetime pursuit?**

**A:** I started out in Political Science and did my BA and MA degrees in that field. While living in Finland and traveling in Europe and Russia, I saw Geography as a more embracing field and one that incorporated my main interests in things like economic development, tourism, resource management, and national parks. I was living in Europe at the time that the Soviet Union was collapsing, the Berlin Wall was coming down, and the Cold War was ending. Geography was essential for understanding these events. I still keep a foot in the Political Science field by teaching a Geopolitics class at UNA, which combines Geography, Political Science, and International Relations.

**Q: Of all the places you have traveled, and of all of the things you have done to contribute to the field of geography, tell me what stands out to you. What makes you proudest to have accomplished?**

**A:** I am most proud of all the students that have taken my classes and who have graduated! I love to see students graduate and move on to their careers. I still keep in touch with many former students, including some from almost 40 years ago!

**Q: Finally, what does it mean to you to receive the Outstanding Service by Faculty award?**

**A:** Service is not usually something that one does alone and in secret, so I see this award as not only recognizing my work but also that of my department, college, university, and the broader community. We all work together to serve.



**Dr. Michael Pretes**



# OUTSTANDING ADVISING

**Dr. Heather Rhodes** is an Associate Professor of Finance in the Department of Economics, Finance, and Data Analytics in the Sanders College of Business and Technology. She is the 2023-2024 recipient of the Outstanding Advising by Faculty award.

Here she is in her own words:

**Q: As an advisor, you share that you see the students in the full context of their lives outside of just their academics. Why is this so important?**

**A:** Our students are more than just ‘students.’ They have lives outside of UNA. Most of them work. Some have spouses and children. Others have parents they care for or have chronic health problems. Understanding what a particular student’s life is like outside of school helps me craft a better plan for their courses and path to graduation. One student may have relatively few commitments and wish to graduate as quickly as possible; that student might do well taking six classes a semester. Another student juggling a job and caring for a sick parent or small child would likely be more successful taking only four or five classes. Given that most students work, many want to structure their classes so they have afternoons free or have all their classes only two to three days a week. Knowing such preferences helps me in designing their course plan and recommending online options. Also, knowing more about the students’ personal aspirations is important in terms of recommending good elective courses. My advisees are all finance majors. Many go into banking, some into analyst positions, and others into wealth management/investment. Each area requires slightly different skill sets and aptitudes. For example, wealth managers need to be better at sales than analysts, who need stronger backgrounds in accounting. Some advisees are better off using electives for courses in sales, while others need advanced accounting courses. If a student is interested in investment but uncomfortable with selling, I can explain that their expectations may differ from those of the employer and suggest they find an internship to get a feel for the job. Overall, the more I know about the student, the better advisor I am.

**Q: What do you see as the most important take away between the advisor and the advisee? And why?**

**A:** The most important takeaway is that the student feels cared for and supported in their aspirations. As an undergraduate at UNA, I had professors who took a personal interest in me, which greatly impacted my career path. I had plans to get an MBA and maybe go to law school. Three or four of my professors (now colleagues) convinced me that I had a knack for finance and encouraged me to get a Ph.D. I never would have had the confidence to pursue a Ph.D. without them. I want to have a similar positive influence on my students, whether by encouraging them, opening doors for internships, or writing recommendation letters. Small acts like a pat on the back and a ‘well done’ can be impactful, especially if a student has personal issues that make getting through the semester challenging. When students realize you care for them, they open up more, enriching the relationship and allowing me to be a better advisor and mentor.

**Q: How do you measure success in this role?**

**A:** I feel successful when my students:

- Have a clear understanding of their path to graduation, what is expected of them in future courses, and why the courses are important to their education and future development.
- Are educated on the job opportunities they have with their

degree, the expectations employers will have of their knowledge and skill set, and whether those expectations align with the students’ interests and abilities.

- Are fully aware of the resources available to aid them and how to access those resources.
- Feel comfortable approaching me when problems arise and feel confident in my ability to help resolve those issues.
- Are empowered to advocate for themselves and take ownership of their personal and professional development.
- Feel valued, respected, and appreciated for their role in our community.

Most specifically, I feel successful as an advisor when a student comes back to me, emails me, or writes me a note to say, “Thank you, you made a difference in my life.” That is the very best measure of success there is.

**Q: How do you balance the dual roles of professor and advisor?**

**A:** I don’t really distinguish between the roles. Both are ultimately about providing students with the best possible education to prepare them for the workforce while balancing their personal and professional lives. When advising a student, I consider whether the courses I recommend for a particular semester pair well with one another and with the student’s other commitments. For example, I try not to pair MG 498 and FI 498 in the same semester because both require a great deal of work outside the classroom and can be stressful on their own. Students can navigate the courses together, but for someone balancing work and school, they might not get a lot out of either course if taken together. As an instructor, I work with students to get the most out of my course and their other courses. For example, if several students have an exam scheduled for the same day as one of my exams, I will work with the class to move my exam or arrange an alternative date for an individual student. I know many professors will not do this, but I believe that dividing their time between two exams unnecessarily stresses them, and more preparation time might help them retain more of the material. In the classroom, I still act as an advisor by educating students on careers. I don’t mind deviating from our topic to discuss tangentially related subjects, especially regarding careers and the real world. Textbooks provide structure and content for classes, but it’s equally important that students understand how the material works in the real world and how it relates to their careers. If students approach me in the classroom for advice on a class or career, I always want to help. There is so much overlap in the two roles that I often don’t think about them separately beyond the time I commit to each task.

**Q: Finally, what does it mean to you to win the Outstanding Advising by Faculty award?**

**A:** It is both exciting and humbling. I absolutely LOVE what I do. I love working with students and seeing them be successful. When I was told to gather a few letters of support from students for this award, I felt awkward asking them to write a letter. But the letters I got humbled me. My students said such kind things. They confirmed that I am making a difference in their lives. I sincerely appreciate the recognition at the awards ceremony and the beautiful plaque I received. The recognition by my peers and the ‘good job’ the award represents both mean a lot and make me feel good, but nothing tops the feeling of knowing that I have made a positive impact on someone else’s life. That’s the very best part of my job.



**Dr. Heather Rhodes**



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