

FACULTY HONORS

Awarding Excellence in Teaching

Winners of the 2014 Goergen Awards are honored for their undergraduate teaching.

By Monique Patenaude

Three associate professors—Julie Bentley, Jonathan Pakianathan, and Jeffrey Tucker—are this year’s recipients of the College’s Goergen Awards for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching.

The awards recognize the distinctive teaching accomplishments and skills of Arts, Sciences & Engineering faculty. They are named for and sponsored by University Trustee Robert Goergen ’60 and his wife, Pamela.

Julie Bentley ’90, ’96 (PhD)

Associate professor of optics

Julie Bentley joined the faculty in 1998 as an adjunct professor and became a full-time professor in 2009. She helped launch the department’s bachelor’s degree in optical engineering, and she pursues research while maintaining strong leadership in the optics community. She is the incoming director of the International Society for Optics and Photonics. “Her expertise helps distinguish the Institute of Optics as the primary place in the United States to learn lens design,” wrote Xi-Cheng Zhang, director of the institute and the M. Parker Givens Professor of Optics, in nominating her for the award.



Wayne Knox, professor of optics, described Bentley in a nominating letter as “one of the best teachers the institute has ever had,” while PhD candidate Matthew Bergkoetter noted that “as a practicing lens designer and consultant with more than 20 years of experience, Professor Bentley brings into the classroom unparalleled insight into state-of-the-art tools and methods in the industry.”

Jonathan Pakianathan

Associate professor of mathematics

In 14 years with the University, Jonathan Pakianathan has designed or revamped five courses for the math department, including a mathematical model course that is an integral part of the public health epidemiology major. He has served as advisor for more than 200 students, supervised numerous senior research projects, and served five years as the department’s chair of undergraduate studies.

The number of math majors has increased by 45 percent since Pakianathan joined the faculty, and department chair Thomas Tucker attributes “a big part of this remarkable increase” to him, calling

Pakianathan a “stellar educator in every sense of the word.”

In nominating Pakianathan, former students recognized his ability to teach complex material clearly. Raechel Isales ’13 wrote that he had an uncanny way of knowing when he was teaching above her ability and yet always managed to make the material meaningful. “This is an absolutely priceless gift in mathematics that I have seen in no other professor,” she said, while Manuel Alves ’09 wrote that he “was continually impressed by the commitment and patience Pakianathan showed toward his students.”




Jeffrey Tucker

Associate professor of English

A member of the English department for 15 years, Jeffrey Tucker is highly regarded by students and colleagues for his passion for teaching and for his intellectual and professional generosity. He is actively involved in the Frederick Douglass Institute for African and African-American Studies and with the Office of Minority Student Affairs. He is also a strong supporter of the International Theatre Program.



Letters in support of his nomination noted that Tucker sparks a love of learning in his students. As a mentor, he is credited with building confidence and skills in students and with helping them discover their own voices as scholars and writers. His nominators also lauded his knowledge of racial representations and cultural and identity politics in literature.

“Jeff’s contributions to undergraduate education and throughout the College deserve thunderous applause from all of us,” wrote Rosemary Kegl, English department chair. John Michael, professor of English, wrote that Tucker has the gift of “tact and courage” to teach courses dealing with difficult subjects, such as the history of race and racism in America. Former student and current teacher Andrea Ferrara Popp ’05 (T5) noted that “if imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then my strongest praise for Dr. Tucker’s teaching can be seen in the way I teach my own English classes.” 

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