

# Excellent Faculty

Honoring outstanding professors

---

Tuesday, May 25, 2021



Every year, a chosen few of UNH's outstanding faculty members from each college and school receive Faculty Excellence Awards in recognition of their achievements in teaching, scholarship and service. Universitywide awards recognize public service, research, teaching and engagement. The 2020 awards include:



**CHARLOTTE WITT (PERRY SMITH)**

**Charlotte Witt, 2020 Distinguished Professor Award**

Academics specialize, and, increasingly, the more tightly focused the specialty is, the better. Who can command the literature in more than one specialty at a time? Professor Charlotte Witt, for one.

Witt has established a world-class reputation in ancient philosophy, especially for her work on Aristotle, known for millennia for both his brilliance and his difficulty. Beginning with “A Mind of One’s Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity,” co-edited with Louise Antony in 1992, she also has carved out a world-class reputation as a feminist metaphysician, a leading voice in the field. That book has gone through subsequent editions and even celebrations of its seminal contribution, yet it only marks the beginning of Witt’s editorial curation of the field. Her 2011 book “The Metaphysics of Gender” weaves together issues in feminist theory, metaphysics, moral psychology, ethics and political philosophy; it has spawned conferences and symposia and will soon be followed by a new book further exploring the being of norms and their meaning for human identity. Witt’s international reputation has enhanced the stature of UNH around the globe.

Witt also has taught for decades in UNH’s interdisciplinary humanities program, covering art, literature, history and science, opening up the whole world of the intellect for her students, and modeling for them not merely the communication of information but a truly reflective engagement with fundamental questions. She also has loved her work fostering thesis students and colleagues; she is an honest interlocutor who provides searching and substantive criticisms while simultaneously supporting their efforts and helping them realize their potential as writers, scholars and persons.

Thus, Witt is much more than a distinguished professor: she is a treasured colleague, mentor and friend. One student writes, “Charlotte has a particular knack for making impossible concepts easy to grasp — whether that means Aristotle or your own ability to finish 80 pages of cohesive writing. Her scholarship and friendship have formed me as a writer and human. I’m so grateful for her and how working with her made me a braver, smarter, and more careful person.” A colleague enumerates the qualities that make Charlotte Witt a mentor extraordinaire: “respect for the person, gentleness and empowerment, all which inspire trust. It is not only that Charlotte says the right things;

her supportive attitude is conveyed implicitly in how she is with me and how she is with our colleagues.”

We exult in honoring her.



**LINDA RAGLAND (LISA NUGENT)**  
**Linda Ragland, 2020 Paul College Teaching Excellence Award**

Associate professor of accounting Linda Ragland began her journey to teaching excellence as an adjunct shortly after earning her M.S. in the same discipline. Her passion for and expertise in governmental and non-profit accounting developed first while working for a Tennessee agency before pursuing graduate education and ultimately joining UNH in 2013.

Unsurprisingly, this expertise grounded in experience is one foundation of her teaching excellence. One student in the reputedly challenging Intermediate Financial Accounting I remarked, “I greatly appreciated her enthusiasm for the course material and hearing about her experience in the field. She knew exactly what she was talking about. She was also super supportive in helping the class do our best both in and out of class.”

Ragland also teaches master’s level courses focusing on ethics, governmental and nonprofit accounting, combining high expectations with an extremely learner-centered and supportive approach that ensures students are prepared for their professional accounting careers. Her graduate students have noted, “Professor Ragland did a great job using her experience and knowledge guiding the class through the muddy terrain of governmental accounting,” and, “She is fair, knowledgeable, empathetic and cares. I have now taken three classes with her and feel equipped to succeed in my professional career.”

Students always find her courses challenging yet emerge with greater confidence in their abilities to learn, setting them up for success



**VANESSA GRUNKEMEYER**

**(JEREMY GASOWSKI)**

**Vanessa Grunkemeyer, COLSA 2020 Excellence in Teaching Award**

"Best teacher ever."

That is how many students have described Vanessa Grunkemeyer, COLSA clinical assistant professor of agriculture, nutrition and food systems. One student put an even finer point on it, saying, "Dr. Grunkemeyer may possibly be the most knowledgeable person I have ever met. She treats everyone with respect, and she is also highly respected by everyone in the class."

Comments like these make it clear that Grunkemeyer is a dedicated teacher who seeks the best for her students. She has spent countless hours reinventing and redefining curriculum offerings and worked closely with others to advance the quality of COLSA's animal science program, within which she is a widely respected and valued leader among her peers and collaborators.

One of her senior colleagues perhaps said it best: "Through my many interactions with Dr. Grunkemeyer, I am struck by her intense dedication to her students, her creativity in course design and her attentiveness to the needs of our animal science program and its students."

We are inspired by Grunkemeyer's great work, leadership, and willingness to help students, programs and the college succeed through innovation and dedication. We are pleased indeed to recognize her with COLSA's 2020 excellence in teaching award.



**TODD DEMITCHELL (LISA NUGENT)**

**Todd DeMitchell, 2020 Graduate Faculty Mentor Award**

Professor of education Todd DeMitchell has a long and distinguished history as a mentor and scholar at UNH. During his 30-year career, he has advised more than 80 masters and doctoral students. He is a past recipient of the UNH Distinguished Professor Award, he has worked tirelessly in graduate education to provide exemplary service to students.

Part of what makes DeMitchell special is his deep commitment to practicing the ethics he studies and teaches. This is evidenced most clearly in his collaborations with graduate students. He treats his doctoral students with respect and conveys a sincere interest in their success. Consistent comments from his graduate advisees reflect his “compassionate yet firm” approach to both teaching and mentoring.

DeMitchell gives generously of his time to both his formal advisees and to many graduate students seeking advice about research in educational leadership. Known in the graduate student community as a reliable, generous, astute faculty member who is dedicated to justice, ethics, the law and education, his presence has had lasting results: Almost all of his graduate students are currently employed in fields related to their degrees.

In addition to being an outstanding mentor and role model, DeMitchell brings two decades of K-12 teaching experience to his work, and his courses are in high demand with students, educators and administrators alike. It’s a testament to DeMitchell’s influence and impact to note that just about every school administrator in New Hampshire has taken a course or worked with him at some point in their career, and it is more than fitting to recognize him with the university’s 2020 Graduate Faculty Mentor Award.



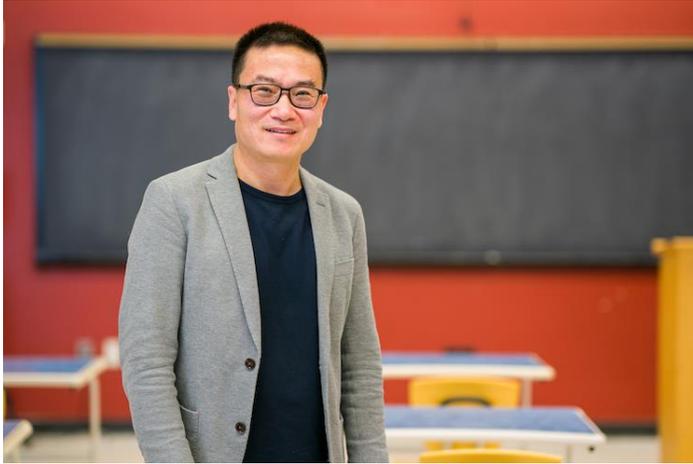
**SCOTT SMITH (JEREMY GASOWSKI)**

**Scott Smith, Jean Brierley Award for Excellence in Teaching**

Scott Smith's transformative teaching is firmly grounded in and inspired by his own experiences as a student who has never stopped learning. With his constant intellectual curiosity and irrepressible love for taking on new challenges, he brings a learner's eye to every course he teaches as a professor of classics, humanities and Italian studies, and it's no wonder that the result is a dizzyingly varied teaching portfolio and a commitment to continual evolution and improvement.

But no matter what the course is — and he's taught on the Durham campus, online and abroad; in small seminars and in some of UNH's largest lectures; covering a vast range of material about the ancient worlds of the Greeks and Romans, from languages to literature to drama to archaeology to history to myth —Smith's underlying goal is not to make sure that students learn every single detail of content so much as it is to help them discover the true joy that comes from serious thinking, deep learning and challenging oneself intellectually.

In essence, he offers a standing bargain: whatever students need to do their best, he will give them, no matter how much time and effort it requires on his part. The sincerity of his offer and the methods he employs to make it a reality are obvious from the results. It's no coincidence that during his two decades at UNH his students have regularly described him as "amazing," "incredible," "inspirational," and "the best," among myriad other superlatives. It is a suitable honor indeed to recognize him with the university's 2021 Jean Brierley Award for Excellence in Teaching.



**NAN YI (JEREMY GASOWSKI)**

**Nan Yi, 2020 CEPS Excellence in Teaching Award**

The recognition of Nan Yi, assistant professor of chemical engineering, as the 2020 CEPS Excellence in Teaching Award recipient is a testament to his steadfast commitment to and genuine concern for students. Professor Yi is appreciated by students for his “extra effort,” for “doing whatever he can,” and for being “always available to answer questions.” Students in the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences are fortunate to experience his devotion and his caring demeanor.

Yi is a skillful instructor. During his time at UNH, he has been tasked with teaching a wide array of courses, ranging from fundamentals and laboratory-based subjects to project-oriented coursework. No matter the subject, he possesses the ability to make class material interesting and accessible to all students. This skill is a considerable asset.

His expertise and approach to teaching has created a positive academic experience for many at UNH. One student summarizes the sentiments articulated by many by stating that Yi is “one of the best instructors I have had the privilege to know while at UNH.” It is our great pleasure to award the 2020 College of Engineering and Physical Sciences’ Excellence in Teaching Award to Nan Yi.



**MICHAEL LEESE (JEREMY**

**GASOWSKI)**

## **Michael Leese, 2020 COLA Excellence in Teaching Award**

A former student of assistant professor of history Michael Leese eloquently describes the impact his teaching has had on her.

“I reflected on ancient Spartan history when determining which candidate would earn my vote in the 2020 Presidential primary,” she recalls. “When my family members discuss economic hardships that they are experiencing, I can engage them in conversations about solutions and challenges associated with the same hardships in different times and places throughout history. Class discussions on Piketty and Marx have informed aspects of my work in the human services field, such as teaching an economic empowerment curriculum to survivors of domestic violence. The lessons professor Leese taught me are relevant to my everyday life, and I am a better citizen and social change agent because of them.”

Since 2015, Leese has been connecting the ancient world to the present in Greek and Roman history courses, many in his research fields of economics and capitalism. He’s able to successfully engage the senior mechanical engineering major who is “less than enthusiastic” about a history Discovery course as effectively as the American history graduate student who is dipping a toe into Greco-Roman times. With humor, enthusiasm and empathy, Leese opens students’ eyes to new ways of viewing the world through the lens of the ancients, making them better scholars and citizens.



**KABRIA BAUMGARTNER (JEREMY GASOWSKI)**

## **Kabria Baumgartner, 2020 Outstanding Assistant Professor**

Assistant professor of American studies and English Kabria Baumgartner does it all. She is the highly lauded author of “In Pursuit of Knowledge,” an exploration of educational activism among Black women in antebellum America, which won two prestigious awards in 2020. She also is a public intellectual who is much sought after to provide not only new insights into African American history and culture, but also her expertise in translating that knowledge for non-academic audiences. On top of all that, she won a \$100,000 grant from the National Parks Service to develop a public humanities project on African American life in Essex County, Massachusetts.

Baumgartner's scholarly excellence is matched by her stellar work in the classroom. She is an impressively innovative and hands-on teacher, who brings her research into lectures and lively class discussions with her students.

In all of her many endeavors, Baumgartner's extraordinary intellectual generosity and dedication to social justice come to the fore. Through the African American role models that she has recovered from the past, she not only urges us to recognize the long history of both gender and racial educational disparity, but she also inspires us to create more equitable access to education today.

I can think of no one more deserving of winning the Outstanding Assistant Professor Award for 2020 than Kabria Baumgartner.



**JOHN WILCOX (LISA NUGENT)**

**John Wilcox, 2020 CHHS Teaching Excellence Award**

John Wilcox's commitment to hands-on education, community service and his students' success are the embodiment of excellence in teaching.

The range of Wilcox's leadership in the occupational therapy program is impressive. In addition to delivering lecture and lab-based courses, he works with his students' internship supervisors to ensure continuity, cohesion of content and quality of programming to support the curriculum of the College of Health and Human Services. He also oversees a community-based course which involves students providing intervention to groups of people in a variety of community settings. These community programs range from helping people with acquired brain injury to people with psychosocial challenges, or people with dual diagnoses and multiple needs.

Wilcox continually seeks out new opportunities in the community for his students, and as a skilled OT practitioner and educator, he helps students reflect on their internship experiences and consider their role holistic practitioners in a dynamic health care environment. Students respond well to his leadership and mentoring, describing him as

“honest and respectful” and commenting that he “encourages us to think and act ethically, resourcefully, flexibly and creatively.”

We are proud to have Wilcox as our colleague, and our students are fortunate to benefit so greatly from his many years of clinical experience and dedication to UNH’s teaching mission. It is our great pleasure to honor him the 2020 CHHS Teaching Excellence Award.



**JASON SOKOL (VAL LESTER)**

**Jason Sokol, 2020 Outstanding Associate Professor Award**

Jason Sokol has a gift for teaching complex issues about race. Whether he is giving a lecture at a small-town library, writing an op-ed for The New York Times or teaching UNH undergraduates, Sokol makes even the most challenging subject accessible and stimulating.

According to historian and University of Texas professor Peniel Joseph, Sokol’s books and articles are “reshaping the way American and African American history is being researched and written.” Sokol explored the reaction of white Southerners to the Civil Rights movement in “There Goes my Everything,” re-thought race relations in the Northeast in “All Eyes Are Upon Us,” and then shed new light on the reaction to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. with “The Heavens Might Crack.”

At the same time, Sokol is an award-winning teacher. He’s the most recent recipient of the university’s distinguished Arthur K. Whitcomb professorship, a three-year position that recognizes teaching excellence. Undergraduates praise his skill at navigating difficult discussion topics and motivating students to speak freely; graduate students rave about him as a shrewd, thoughtful and accessible mentor.

Most important at a land-grant institution, Sokol has given dozens of lectures over the years to audiences large and small, understanding that recognition within a university does not matter much without outreach beyond campus. It is our great pleasure to honor him now with the 2020 outstanding associate professor award.



**HARRIET FERTIK (JEREMY**

**GASOWSKI)**

**Harriet Fertik, 2020 COLA Excellence in Teaching Award**

If you are familiar with improvisational theatre, you might have heard about “yes, and.” The idea is that you want to avoid saying something to shut down the scene, so instead of saying “no,” you say “yes, and” — you build on what your partner is giving you.

Harriet Fertik says she thinks about “yes, and” a lot when she is teaching. Her aim is to build a conversation that includes as many students as possible that can be sustained throughout the semester. An associate professor of classics, Fertik has been saying “yes, and” for the past seven years at UNH — in Latin and Greek language courses, in Roman history and culture courses, and in a host of experiences she undertakes with students, such as discussing architecture in the dusty streets of Pompeii through study abroad or dissecting *Black Odyssey* on the way back from Trinity Rep in Providence (*Black classicism* being among her scholarly specializations).

Her students say she goes “above and beyond” and “bends over backwards” to support them. One was “stunned” at the lengths Fertik went to find her an internship. Another at the fully funded UT Austin doctoral spot she helped him earn. Fertik is highly intelligent, broadly knowledgeable and deeply passionate about teaching, her colleagues note — always concerned with helping students see that classics have much to say about 21st century life.



GREGORY MCMAHON (JEREMY

**GASOWSKI)**

**Gregory McMahon, Excellence in International Engagement Award**

Gregory McMahon is one of those rare scholar-teachers who stands astride the international crossroads, not only between the “here” and the “there,” but also between the “now” and “then.”

His commitment to international engagement is perhaps best exemplified by the archaeological excavation that he co-directs. It is located in modern Turkey but focused on a site (Çadır Höyük) that extends from the Chalcolithic to the Byzantine period — the site in Turkey with the longest continual habitation, some 6,500 years. The excavation itself involves a large international team and requires the diplomatic chops to negotiate with Turkish officials from the local level to the national. Professor McMahon not only navigates that process adroitly, but he does also so in fluent Turkish.

As his co-director notes, every class that McMahon teaches is international in nature, and he is always careful to insist on understanding other cultures on their own terms. As one former student who participated in the dig relates, he was “very patient in telling me about Turkish customs, culture, and the language. ... I benefitted from this experience as an opportunity...to embrace a society that functions and presents itself in a totally different way compared to America. As an international student, this experience further broadens my understanding of this world as a diverse and fascinating place.”



**ERIN HILEY SHARP (JEREMY**

**GASOWSKI)**

**Erin Hiley Sharp, 2020 Excellence in Public Service Award**

When COVID hit in March 2020, faculty, administrators and students reacted to an unprecedented series of challenges, but few worked harder over ensuing months than associate professor of human development and family studies Erin Sharp. As incoming chair of the faculty senate in spring 2020, Sharp was intimately involved in the shift to fully remote learning that took place during the second half of the spring semester. Her work only intensified over the summer as she became chair and helped oversee the return to in-person learning last fall.

True to Sharp's core values, despite the added demands on her time, she never lost sight of why UNH exists: to serve students. Nowhere was this core value more apparent than in her work to help launch a fundraising effort that directed resources to students impacted by the pandemic.

Serving as faculty senate chair during a pandemic is herculean enough but maintaining other service roles on top of that is another thing entirely. Professor Sharp has continued to serve the UNH Office of Community Standards and still volunteers as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for New Hampshire CASA. Through her engaged scholarship around the state, she embodies the UNH ideal of "Embracing New Hampshire."

The manner in which Sharp models exceptional public service makes her a most fitting recipient indeed of the university's 2020 Excellence in Public Service Award. As one of her former students said, "It is clear that she cares about spreading her desire to help others to those around her."



**ALEX HOLZNIENKEMPER (JEREMY**

**GASOWSKI)**

**Alex Holzniekemper, 2020 COLA Excellence in Teaching Award**

Who knew we had a YouTube sensation right here at UNH? German lecturer Alex Holzniekemper's 23-minute video on German adjective endings has been viewed more than 97,000 times on the platform. He even took a bit of a star turn at one point, when adoring Florida State students who had benefited from the instruction spotted him on a street in Germany. Beyond its entertainment value, Holzniekemper's YouTube engagement points to several highly effective aspects of his teaching: he knows his field cold; he knows how to make material accessible to students and he leaves a lasting impression.

A member of the UNH faculty since 2017, Holzniekemper teaches German language courses at all levels, as well as literature and culture courses in German and English. His students say his deep knowledge and ability to make the content relevant help them thrive academically while his care and concern help them personally. Pressing societal issues such as immigration, race inequality, women's rights and prison reform are woven into the course material because, one student says, "he truly wants us to succeed both as students and members of society." His expectations are high, but so, too, is his commitment to help his students meet them. One colleague reflects that "he gains students' respect through his own hard work and obvious passion for German, for social justice and for the humanities."



**JENNIFER JACOBS (JEREMY**

**GASOWSKI)**

**Jennifer Jacobs, 2020 Excellence in Research Award**

Jennifer Jacobs passionately pursues research projects aimed at understanding and preparing for the impact of a changing climate on the natural and built environment. She has an excellent record of success in her scholarship activities as evidenced by traditional measures that include number of publications, citations of publications, successful funding and repeat funding from respected sources, funding and mentoring graduate students and especially Ph.D.s and leadership positions with national professional organizations.

A professor of civil and environmental engineering, Jacobs is a recognized leader in both hydrologic and climate change adaptation circles. Beyond her academic influence, Jacobs has always been able to apply her research to real-world issues, especially in matters of sustainability and the impact of climate change. She has taken her work so much further by emphasizing the need to collaborate across disciplines with climate scientists, engineers, and policymakers and by working with social scientists to determine effective ways to do so. It is this emphasis that makes her approach to research, education and collaboration on climate change and infrastructure issues stand out as a model for catalyzing the changes that are needed in both research and policymaking communities.

Jacobs is making a difference in not only her field but society at large and is an eminently fitting recipient of the university's 2020 excellence in research award.



**NICHOLAS MIAN (DAVID VOGT)**

**Nicholas Mian, 2020 Manchester Excellence in Teaching Award**

Since joining the UNH Manchester faculty in 2015, assistant professor of psychology Nicholas Mian's passion for his subject has been a beacon of inspiration for students.

Mian brings his expertise as a licensed clinical psychologist into his classroom and lab, where students get real-world learning in child psychology. Incorporating hands-on lab elements and collaborative learning activities, Mian focuses on teaching practical skills for the future. These skills include research, which is central to Mian's curriculum. His students are empowered to put concepts into action by working directly with children and families in his child psychology lab.

In addition to teaching, Mian's research centers on understanding anxiety in young children and strengthening the design and implementation of early intervention and prevention programs. He is a tremendous asset to the Manchester faculty and a worthy recipient of the 2020 teaching excellence award.

- **COMPILED BY:**  
[Jody Record '95](#) | Communications and Public Affairs | [jody.record@unh.edu](mailto:jody.record@unh.edu)

**PHOTOGRAPHER:**  
[Jeremy Gasowski](#) | Communications and Public Affairs | [jeremy.gasowski@unh.edu](mailto:jeremy.gasowski@unh.edu) |  
603-862-4465



UNH Today is produced for the UNH community and for friends of UNH.  
The stories are written by the staff of [UNH Communications and Public Affairs](#).  
Email us: [unhtoday.editor@unh.edu](mailto:unhtoday.editor@unh.edu).

[MANAGE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION](#)   [CONTACT US](#)

Like us on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter

Follow us on YouTube

Follow us on Instagram

Find us on LinkIn

UNH Today RSS feeds

UNH Today • UNH Main Directory: 603-862-1234  
Copyright © 2022 • TTY Users: 7-1-1 or 800-735-2964 (Relay NH)  
[USNH Privacy Policies](#) • [USNH Terms of Use](#) • [ADA Acknowledgement](#)