

# “You’re the Top”

COLA faculty honored with university-wide awards

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Wednesday, November 17, 2021

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The University of New Hampshire annually selects a small number of outstanding faculty for special recognition of achievement. Six faculty members from the College of Liberal Arts were recently honored for their excellent work as teachers, scholars and mentors.

[KIMBERLY ALEXANDER](#) [JENNIFER BORDA](#) [KURK DORSEY](#) [ELLEN FITZPATRICK](#) [KATHRYN MCCURDY](#) [ETHEL SARA WOLPER](#)

## Kimberly Alexander, 2021 Award for Excellence in Teaching



KIMBERLY ALEXANDER, LECTURER IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY. Kimberly Alexander knows a thing or two about shoes. She's the author of the award-winning book, "Treasures Afoot," which explores the history of the 18th century Georgian shoe and its journey from bustling London streets to the feet of New Englanders. A lecturer in [history](#), Alexander is a scholar of 18th and 19th century New England material culture and history, and a museum professional passionate about public history. As such, she is steeped not only in shoes but in all manner of textiles, as well as art, architecture and archaeological finds. This rich archive is fundamental to her teaching, which can be described quite literally as "hands-on," even if it requires PPE. She brings objects to the classroom so students can personalize history. One guest lecturer arrives to class in Civil War costume; another hews wood with period tools. Her private collection of textiles offers up its own lessons, as do the museum field trips her classes take. History takes form through the paraphernalia of both the famous and the ordinary, and by practicing the methods used to tease out their meaning.

From gateway offerings to the specialized courses in the museum studies graduate program she directs, Alexander prepares students to succeed. Many an internship and project she supervised has turned into a job at sites such as Old Sturbridge Village, the Wright Museum and Ancestry.com.

One undergraduate student sums up Alexander’s impact in this way: “She has taught me both history and life lessons. She has been there for me and supported me as I live away from home. My experience at UNH would be completely different if it weren’t for her.”

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## Jennifer Borda, 2021 Award for Excellence in Teaching



JENNIFER BORDA, PROFESSOR IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION. [Communication](#) Professor Jennifer Borda is never not thinking about her students, says one of her colleagues. A teacher and highly regarded scholar of rhetoric, feminist studies and democratic deliberation, she is constantly innovating in both her syllabi and the rhetoric curriculum. Assignments must be relevant and engaging, such as “Fake News,” an interactive virtual game she recently co-created to teach students to recognize the strategies in which fake news is propagated. She is tireless in challenging her students to realize their fullest potential – an effort deeply appreciated by them, including one undergraduate with whom she recently co-published an article in a prominent communication journal.

Borda's goal as a teacher is to "foster students' education and progression as effective communicators, critical thinkers and life-long learners better prepared to engage the world as ethical, enlightened and thoughtful citizens."

Perhaps nothing better demonstrates that goal than her work in the Civil Discourse Lab, which she co-founded and co-directs. The CDL, as it's called, teaches students the theory and techniques of civil discourse and guides them as they put theory into practice in public dialogues on difficult topics. At a time when civil discourse is sorely needed nationally and globally, Borda prepares students to make meaningful impacts in their careers and communities.

In a wonderfully symbiotic way, Borda's students give as good as they get, such as Cathy, a non-traditional student and mother of two adult daughters, who overcame her self-doubt to grow into an academic role model. When Cathy's name was called at the graduation ceremony, her family jumped to their feet and erupted in cheers. Borda recalls: "I had a difficult time keeping my composure on stage...It was one of the most fulfilling moments of my teaching career."

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## Kurk Dorsey, 2021 Award for Graduate Faculty Mentor



KURK DORSEY, PROFESSOR IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY.

[History](#) Professor Kurk Dorsey has been an integral part of the UNH community for over 25 years, serving in various roles including director of graduate studies and chair of the History Department. The impact of Dorsey's teaching and scholarship on how foreign policy and the environment intersect to influence American history is made clear by a quick look at his CV, which includes, among many impressive accomplishments, several previous UNH recognitions and two award-winning books. This award he receives, however, recognizes something that he would probably agree is even more important than his own academic achievements, and that is his impact on graduate students as an advisor and mentor.

During his career, Dorsey has supervised 16 doctoral students and 20 master's students and served on a total of 68 committees. Those numbers are astounding and clear evidence of his commitment to his department and its students, but they do not tell the whole story. What makes Dorsey stand out as a mentor is the ongoing care he takes in helping his students find their way, while they are students at UNH and afterward. This is demonstrated most clearly in the testimony that poured in from former students for his nomination. "He is incredibly selfless," "...a mentor who does the right thing, all the time, without question," "...he has done everything possible to facilitate my success," "I am a better student, professional, and person because of him."

Dorsey's warm generosity, kindness, wit and dedication to his students, colleagues and the university as a whole make him most deserving of the Graduate Faculty Mentor Award.

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## Ellen Fitzpatrick, 2021 Jean Brierley Award for Excellence in Teaching



ELLEN FITZPATRICK, PROFESSOR IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY.

[History](#) Professor Ellen Fitzpatrick's long-standing and consistent record of exceptional teaching makes her a highly appropriate recipient of this very special recognition. Her impactful teaching is experienced first-hand by undergraduate and graduate students and, importantly too, the public at large — because of her extensive record of national and regional media interviews and commentary.

In recognition of Fitzpatrick's truly outstanding record of scholarship, teaching, mentoring and collegial service, she has already received many top awards — including the COLA Lindberg Award, given to an outstanding teacher-scholar in the College, and UNH's Excellence in Public Service Award. As her colleagues and associates attest, she is not only an intellectually brilliant and engaging scholar and a highly conscientious, energetic and dedicated teacher, but also extremely hard-working and effective at what she does. She excels at communicating complex historical ideas clearly, combining a commanding presence with a sense of humor that wins over her audience. Even as she is renowned in the department as a great lecturer, insightful discussion leader and helpful mentor, Fitzpatrick may be even more successful as a public intellectual, taking her formidable teaching skills beyond campus. For many

years, she was a recurrent guest on the “PBS NewsHour,” and it seems that she has been interviewed by every TV outlet and major newspaper in the country. With more than 150 interviews, she has been the department’s most prominent voice in the media. In her 25 years at the university, Fitzpatrick has been a master teacher in the classroom and in the community beyond campus. Simply put, she belongs in the esteemed ranks of the Jean Brierley Award winners.

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## Kathryn McCurdy, 2021 Award for Excellence in Teaching



KATHRYN MCCURDY, CLINICAL ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

"Practice what you preach," is a saying that has special significance for education faculty, although, in the field, it's modified to "practice what you teach." As someone who prepares and mentors aspiring and novice teachers, Kathryn McCurdy, clinical assistant professor of [education](#), is ever vigilant about embodying what she teaches, putting theory into actions that students might then consider bringing into their own classrooms. Central to what she demonstrates is a deep respect for and celebration of all the ways that students express their questions, wonderings and understandings. In

so doing, she has earned the great admiration of her students, who say they can only hope to inspire their own students as much as she has inspired them.

McCurdy's influence on educators in New Hampshire is deep and far-reaching – she directs education field experiences at the Manchester campus, teaches and mentors in the north country Teacher Residency for Rural Education program, and teaches courses in Durham not only to preservice teachers but also to seasoned educators pursuing their master's or doctoral degrees. In all cases, she brings to bear her formidable skills and innovations in STEM pedagogy and diversity, equity and inclusion practices. Moreover, she is an excellent scholar whose research impacts travels well beyond our borders.

Thinking back on all her years in education, McCurdy offers this: "Teaching is a vulnerable and sometimes emotional profession. We pour our hearts and minds into our work daily. In all my work with beginning teachers, there comes a time when the two of us learn how to be okay with being vulnerable and talking through those moments of uncomfortableness — how to share something emotional while also embracing our strength. I find these moments powerful."

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## Ethel Sara Wolper, 2021 Award for Excellence in International Engagement



ETHEL SARA WOLPER, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY.

“Professor Wolper made a foreign topic very accessible and...extremely fascinating.” So wrote a student in Sara Wolper’s Islamic Art class, summing up her career at UNH.

Wolper, associate professor of [history](#), studies the Medieval period from an art history perspective. With research abilities in Arabic, French, Modern Turkish and Ottoman Turkish, she has published and presented material in a wide range of venues. Just since 2010, she has presented her work in Istanbul, London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Ankara and Kalamazoo.

Her most important work has been on the website [RememberingMosul.org](http://RememberingMosul.org). She and her colleagues recognized that in many places caught in the wars that have raged across the Middle East over the last 20 years, there was no record of what had been lost. The project is truly remarkable, bringing together the humanities, GIS technology and area studies. Wolper and her team, which has included three UNH undergraduates from different disciplines, a visual resource librarian, an architectural historian from Newcastle University and an assistant professor of architecture at Koya University in Iraqi Kurdistan, have labored to catalogue many of the lost or damaged spaces in Mosul.

And perhaps most importantly, they have made connections with Mosulis, who like many people caught in the middle of fighting, have not always been consulted on how rebuilding should proceed.

Wolper has helped to bring the world to UNH but also brought her work to the world. As a teacher, a scholar and a servant, she has been engaged internationally since the day she arrived.

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#### FACULTY EXCELLENCE



University of New Hampshire

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