In Celebration of Achievement

2020 UNIVERSITY TEACHING AWARDS

PRESENTED BY THE CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE
Luay Nakhleh, the 2019 George R. Brown Prize for Excellence in Teaching, chair of the Department of Computer Science and the J. S. Abercrombie Professor of Computer Science
At the end of each academic year, the Center for Teaching Excellence hosts the university’s formal awards ceremony that provides an opportunity for Rice administrators, faculty and students to celebrate the contributions of Rice instructors who have devoted themselves to both their students and the craft of teaching. These awards honor the commitment to excellence in teaching, mentorship and service demonstrated by our award winners.

This year, we are unable to hold the university award ceremony in person to congratulate the winners due to the restrictions placed on the city of Houston and the Rice community regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. It is our hope that this newsletter provides an opportunity for the Rice community to celebrate this year’s recipients for their commitment, dedication, and excellence in teaching, service and commitment to Rice University.

The work of the award winners demonstrates Rice University’s commitment to create meaningful, transformative, and empowering learning experiences for undergraduate and graduate students. Their collective and individual efforts epitomize the dedication to excellence in teaching and learning at Rice, which draws students from across the country and the globe. This dedication has never been more evident than during our university’s transition to remote teaching and work, as faculty, staff and students approached trying circumstances with flexibility and generosity. We congratulate and thank them for their contributions to our community of learners.

Robin Paige
Director, Center for Teaching Excellence
Adjunct Professor, Sociology
STC TEACHING AWARD
The STC Teaching Award recognizes the exceptional undergraduate instructors of student taught courses at Rice. The process for determining the two winners of the STC Teaching Award was developed by the Center for Teaching Excellence’s (CTE) undergraduate advisory board. The winner is selected by a committee composed of two CTE faculty fellows and previous George R. Brown Teaching Award winners. Selection criteria are based on a class observation completed by a CTE graduate fellow, a review of instructional materials and student evaluations.

GRADUATE TEACHING AWARDS
Developed by the CTE, Graduate Teaching Awards recognize graduate students who excelled at supporting undergraduate teaching at Rice as instructors of record and teaching assistants. Each year, four winners are selected by committees composed of CTE graduate liaisons, CTE graduate fellows and CTE faculty fellows in the following categories: independent instruction, course support and student support. The winners are selected based on their teaching philosophy, use of research-based methods and contribution to student learning. In order to apply for the course support award, graduate students have to be first nominated by a faculty instructor. Applicants for the student support award are asked to submit references from one undergraduate student.

SARAH A. BURNETT TEACHING PRIZE IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
The Sarah A. Burnett Teaching Prize in Social Sciences is awarded to the faculty member(s) with the highest teaching scores in the previous academic year. The faculty member must have taught at least two undergraduate courses with a minimum of 15 students, with at least one being a lecture course.

SAROFIM PROFESSOR FOR DISTINGUISHED TEACHING IN THE HUMANITIES
The Allison Sarofim Distinguished Teaching Professorship in the Humanities originated in the early 1990s. The award recognizes a kind of teaching that is important but seldom recognized: mentors of undergraduate theses or similar scale projects, graduate students’ directed readings or dissertations. The award recognizes this kind of one-on-one mentorship in the context of overall strong teaching in all the faculty member’s regular courses. The award is open to any professorial rank.
GRADUATE LIBERAL STUDIES
JOHN FREEMAN AWARDS
The purpose of the Graduate Liberal Studies John Freeman Faculty Teaching and Faculty Mentoring Awards is to annually recognize two outstanding GLS faculty who make significant contributions to the program or in the service of its students. Awardees exemplify the qualities of interdisciplinary liberal arts teaching and have participated significantly in teaching or advising graduate liberal studies students.

AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING IN THE SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
The Excellence in Teaching Award recognizes continued excellence in teaching and exemplary commitment to the education of undergraduate or graduate students within the School of Engineering.

TEACHING AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING
To bring attention to the efforts across campus to scaffold inquiry and research into the curriculum, this award recognizes faculty who demonstrate excellence in the use of inquiry-based learning pedagogies in undergraduate teaching. Criteria for selection include innovation and risk-taking, implementation of research-based practices, student evaluations and comments, and a peer nomination letter. The winning faculty member receives $1,500 directly and an additional $1,500 in a university fund for use in enhancing inquiry-based learning.

SOPHIA MEYER FARB PRIZE FOR TEACHING (PHI BETA KAPPA TEACHING AWARD)
Each year, the Rice chapter (Beta of Texas) of the national Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society recognizes a nontenured assistant professor or assistant teaching professor for outstanding teaching performance. An ad hoc committee of the general membership selects the winner after a review of the student evaluations of all eligible faculty, and the winner is invited to give a short speech at the spring induction ceremony. The award also includes an honorarium supported by the Sophia M. Farb Family Phi Beta Kappa Fund. The award was established in the 1970s by Rice alumnus Aubrey Farb ’42; a list of past winners can be found here.

CHARLES W. DUNCAN, JR. ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING FACULTY
The Duncan Award was established in 1998 in honor of Charles Duncan, former chairman of the Rice Board of Trustees, and is presented each year to a full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty member in recognition of outstanding performance in the areas of both teaching and scholarship.
NICOLAS SALGO OUTSTANDING TEACHING AWARD
The Nicolas Salgo Outstanding Teaching Award is Rice's oldest teaching award. It was created in 1966 and is funded by the Salgo-Noren Foundation. Each year, voting is open to the junior and senior classes. The faculty member with the most votes is awarded the Salgo award.

PRESIDENTIAL MENTORING AWARD
The Presidential Mentoring Award was established to recognize faculty members with outstanding contributions to the mentoring of Rice students. An emphasis is placed on mentoring graduate students and in particular those who are members of traditionally underrepresented groups.

GEORGE R. BROWN AWARDS
The George R. Brown Teaching Awards honors outstanding faculty as determined by the votes of alumni. All current faculty members are eligible except immediate past winners and lifetime honorary recipients. Alumni are asked to rank in order their top five faculty and only their top five faculty. The Committee on Teaching reviews the data and determines nine superior winners and one excellence winner.

RICE UNIVERSITY FACULTY AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN UNIVERSITY SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP
This award is bestowed annually on a faculty member who has made significant and distinctive contributions to the mission of Rice University through exceptional university service and leadership.

RICE UNIVERSITY FACULTY AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN PROFESSIONAL SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP
This award is bestowed annually on a faculty member who has made significant contributions to the academic profession or to the wider community (local, national or international) through professional service and leadership.

RICE UNIVERSITY FACULTY AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH, TEACHING AND SERVICE
This award is bestowed periodically on a faculty member who fulfills the Rice academic ideal by exhibiting exemplary achievement in all aspects of faculty responsibilities — research, teaching and service.
**STC TEACHING AWARD**

Daniel Koh is an English major and a member of Jones College, Class of 2020. Daniel is currently finishing up his teacher certification at Rice and looks forward to creating positive change and advocating for students through a career in education. One of the winners of a 2019 student-lead teaching award, Daniel led the course Hip Hop History.

Stephanie Scoville is Hawaiian born and raised on the island of Oahu. She is proud to be graduating with the Rice University Class of 2020 with a major in environmental science and a minor in biochemistry and cell biology. In the fall, she will be pursuing a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine at Washington State University.

Erik Yamada ’19 also grew up on the island of Oahu and majored in computer science. He is currently working in New York City as a software engineer.

Despite their commonalities, Stephanie and Erik did not meet in Hawaii nor at Rice. By a stroke of luck, they booked adjacent seats for a flight from Houston to Honolulu and met on the plane. A couple years later, they created the course COLL 186: Beyond the Brochure to share the unique history and culture of their Hawaiian home with their Rice classmates.

**GRADUATE TEACHING AWARD FOR INDEPENDENT INSTRUCTION**

Clint Wilson is a Ph.D. candidate in the English department at Rice, where he is working on a dissertation titled “Toxic Media: Modernism’s History of Poison and Pollution.” At Rice, he has had the privilege of teaching a variety of courses, including Critical Reading and Writing, Forms of Poetry, and Baseball and American Identity, in addition to serving as a co-instructor for the environmental studies core course Environment, Culture and Society.

Christy Nittrouer earned her Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology from Rice University in 2019, master’s degrees from Rice University and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and graduated cum laude with her B.B.A. from the University of Notre Dame. She is currently a tenure-track assistant professor in human resource management/organizational behavior in the Marilyn Davies College of Business at the University of Houston-Downtown. She teaches diversity and inclusion and human resource management undergraduate courses (and soon MBA).
GRADUATE TEACHING AWARD FOR COURSE SUPPORT

Matt Lamb is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science who studies American politics. His dissertation examines the causes and consequences of disparities in election administration practices, polling place operations and resource allocation. He currently teaches POLI 328: Latino Politics in the United States at Rice and also serves as an adjunct professor at Lone Star College-Tomball.

GRADUATE TEACHING AWARD FOR STUDENT SUPPORT

David Mildebrath is a fourth year Ph.D. student in the Department of Computational and Applied Mathematics. Prior to attending Rice, he received a B.S. in physics and pure mathematics from the University of Alabama. His research focuses on improving decision-making in health care, using the tools of mathematical optimization.

SARAH A. BURNETTE TEACHING PRIZE IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Craig Considine is a scholar, professor, global speaker, media contributor and public intellectual based in the Department of Sociology at Rice. He is the author of many books and articles, and his opinions have been featured in The New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, BBC and other media outlets. He holds a Ph.D. from Trinity College (University of Dublin), an M.S. from Royal Holloway (University of London) and a B.A. from American University in Washington, D.C.

Sandra Parsons is an assistant teaching professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences at Rice and the director of pedagogy for her department. She received a Ph.D. in social psychology from Miami University in 1999 and joined the department in 2011 as a full-time, nontenure track instructor. She feels extremely lucky to have an appointment that allows her to devote all of her time and energy to teaching and mentoring undergraduates.
SAROFIM PROFESSOR FOR DISTINGUISHED TEACHING IN THE HUMANITIES

Niki Kasumi Clements is the Watt J. and Lilly G. Jackson Assistant Professor of Religion at Rice, now also the Allison Sarofim Assistant Professor of Distinguished Teaching in the Humanities. She came to Rice in 2014 after finishing her doctoral degree at Brown University in religion and critical thought as a Brown/Wheaton Faculty Fellow. Influenced by her mentors at Brown, Sarah Lawrence College (B.A., 2003) and Harvard Divinity School (MTS, 2007), as well as her students at Rice, her teaching and service share her research attention to recognizing human ability and critiquing structural disparities.

GRADUATE LIBERAL STUDIES JOHN FREEMAN FACULTY TEACHING AWARD

Joseph Campana is a poet, critic and scholar of Renaissance literature. He serves as the Alan Dugald McKillop Professor of English at Rice, where he also is the director of the Center for Environmental Studies. His current projects include a study of children and sovereignty in the works of Shakespeare titled “The Child’s Two Bodies,” a two-volume co-edited collection on insect life in the Renaissance called “Lesser Living Creatures” and “Live Oak,” a collection of poems.

GRADUATE LIBERAL STUDIES JOHN FREEMAN FACULTY MENTORING AWARD

Christopher Johns-Krull is a professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Rice. He joined the department in 2001. His research focuses on observational studies of star and planet formation, with a particular emphasis on the search for extra-solar planets orbiting very young stars. He received his Ph.D. in astronomy from the University of California, Berkeley.
AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING IN THE SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING

Robert Griffin received a B.S. in chemical engineering, summa cum laude, in 1993 from Tufts University and a Ph.D. in chemical engineering with a minor in environmental engineering science in 2000 from the California Institute of Technology. Since 2000, he has held various academic positions, the most recent of which is senior associate dean for the School of Engineering at Rice, which follows his service to the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering as their chair from 2015–2019. His research interests focus on understanding the physical and chemical processes that control the spatial and temporal dynamics of air pollution. He teaches courses on air pollution, atmospheric chemistry and fluid mechanics.

TEACHING AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

Matthew Wettergreen is an associate teaching professor at the Oshman Engineering Design Kitchen at Rice University, where he joined the facility as the first faculty hire in 2013. He co-developed six of the seven engineering design courses in the design curriculum and currently instructs three of these courses, including first-year engineering design and ENGI 210: Prototyping and Fabrication. In 2017, he and three other faculty members combined the engineering design courses at the OEDK to create the first engineering design minor in the U.S.

SOPHIA MEYER FARB PRIZE FOR TEACHING (PHI BETA KAPPA TEACHING AWARD)

Vida Yao is an assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy. She works in ethics and moral psychology, has written on boredom, weakness of will, the guise of the good thesis and implicit bias and organizes the Rice workshop in humanistic ethics. She regularly teaches undergraduate classes on the history of ethics, the philosophy of death and feminist philosophy.
CHARLES W. DUNCAN, JR. ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING FACULTY

Ashok Veeraraghavan is an associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at Rice, where he also directs the Computational Imaging and Vision Lab. His research interests are broadly in the areas of computational imaging, computer vision and robotics. He received his B.S. in electrical engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras in 2002 and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University of Maryland, College Park in 2004 and 2008, respectively.

Reto Geiser is an associate professor of architecture and director of undergraduate studies at the Rice University School of Architecture, where he teaches architectural history, theory and design. A scholar of modern and contemporary architecture and design, his work focuses on the intersections between architecture, pedagogy and media. A founding principal in the Houston-based design practice MG&Co., he is developing spatial strategies in a range of scales from the book to the house.

NICOLAS SALGO OUTSTANDING TEACHING AWARD

Sandra Parsons is an assistant teaching professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences at Rice and the director of pedagogy for her department. She received her Ph.D. in social psychology from Miami University in 1999 and joined the department in 2011 as a full-time, nontenure track instructor. She feels extremely lucky to have an appointment that allows her to devote all of her time and energy to teaching and mentoring undergraduates.

PRESIDENTIAL MENTORING AWARD

Katherine Bennett Ensor is the Noah G. Harding Professor of Statistics in the George R. Brown School of Engineering and director of the Center for Computational Finance and Economic Systems. She also oversees the Kinder Institute Urban Data Platform, a data resource for the Greater Houston area. She is a fellow of the American Statistical Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science and has been recognized for her leadership, scholarship and mentoring.
Anthony B. Pinn received his B.A. from Columbia University, and his Master of Divinity and Ph.D. in the study of religion from Harvard University. He is currently the Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor of Humanities and professor of religion at Rice, and he is Professor Extraordinarius at the University of South Africa. He is the inaugural director of the Rice University Center for African and African American Studies and the founding director of the Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning.

Matteo Pasquali is the A. J. Hartsook Professor of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, Chemistry, and Materials Science and NanoEngineering, where he also serves as chair of the chemistry department and previously served as co-director of the Carbon Nanotechnology Laboratory, as master of Lovett College and as a member of the academic senate. After receiving his laurea from the University of Bologna and Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota, Matteo joined Rice in 2000 to start a laboratory on soft materials.

GEORGE R. BROWN AWARD FOR SUPERIOR TEACHING

Alex Butler is a professor of finance at Rice. His research is in empirical corporate finance, consumer finance and financial markets and focuses on external financing decisions of firms, governments and individuals. He has a Ph.D. in finance from Indiana University and a bachelor’s degree in mathematical economic analysis from Rice.

Simon Fischer-Baum is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences and the director of the Cognitive Science program at Rice. His research focuses on understanding how the human brain is capable of producing and understanding language and depends on a mixture of methods, including functional neuro-imaging, electrophysiology and the study of individuals who have lost language as a result of stroke. In keeping with his research, his teaching focuses on what we currently know and do not know about how the mind works and how we know it, especially thinking about the challenges of how imperfect data from different kinds of measurement can be used to inform our understanding of these core questions about what it means to be human.
Robert Griffin received a B.S. in chemical engineering, summa cum laude, in 1993 from Tufts University and a Ph.D. in chemical engineering with a minor in environmental engineering science in 2000 from the California Institute of Technology. Since 2000, he has held various academic positions, the most recent of which is senior associate dean for the School of Engineering at Rice, which follows his service to the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering as their chair from 2015–2019. His research interests focus on understanding the physical and chemical processes that control the spatial and temporal dynamics of air pollution. He teaches courses on air pollution, atmospheric chemistry and fluid mechanics.

Jason Hafner received his B.S. in physics from Trinity University in 1993, his Ph.D. from Rice in 1998 and pursued postdoctoral studies at Harvard University. He returned to Rice in 2001 and is currently a professor of physics and astronomy and of chemistry. Jason is a member of Scientia at Rice and the magister of Jones College. He has taught freshman and sophomore physics for the past 14 years and was a founding member of Rice’s Center for Teaching Excellence.

Deborah Harter is an associate professor of French in the Department of Classical and European Studies. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley in comparative literature and teaches French narrative and poetry, love and death in film and fiction, approaches to the monstrous, and the ethics of writing. Four-time winner of the George R. Brown Prize for Superior Teaching, she is grateful for the brilliance and stunning dedication of Rice students.

Luay Nakhleh is the J.S. Abercrombie Professor and chair of the computer science department at Rice. He received a B.S. degree in computer science from the Technion (Israel) (1996), a master’s degree in computer science from Texas A&M University (1998) and a Ph.D. degree in computer science from The University of Texas in Austin (2004). He conducts research in the areas of bioinformatics and computational biology. For his teaching, Luay has received multiple awards, including the Phi Beta Kappa Teaching Award in 2009 and the George R. Brown Prize for Excellence in Teaching in 2019.
**Despina Colette Nicolaou** received a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Drexel University, an M.S. in physiology and biophysics from Georgetown University and a B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania. She serves as a faculty associate and O-week adviser at McMurtry College. She was awarded the George R. Brown Award from Superior Teaching in 2018 and the Sarah A. Burnett Teaching Prize in the Social Sciences in 2019. She teaches Introduction to Psychology and Developmental Psychology and loves sharing her clinical experiences while constantly learning from students’ unique insights.

**Robert Werth** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Rice and a faculty affiliate of the Politics, Law and Social Thought program. Broadly, his research and teaching interests include law and society, punishment, social imaginaries of offenders, and algorithms, and the governance of risk, social theory and ethnography. In 2014, he was awarded the Sarah A. Burnett Teaching Prize in Social Sciences, and in 2018 he was awarded the George R. Brown Prize for Excellence in Teaching.

**Anthony Várilly-Alvarado** is a professor of mathematics. He joined Rice in 2009 after completing his Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley. He studies the fundamental arithmetic properties of solutions to systems of polynomial equations in several variables. At Rice, he has taught a variety of courses, ranging from introductory courses like Single Variable Calculus and Honors Linear Algebra through to advanced graduate courses on elliptic curves and algebraic surfaces.

**GEORGE R. BROWN PRIZE FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING**

**Julianne M. Yost** is a lecturer of biosciences and a faculty associate of Will Rice College. She received her B.S. in biochemistry from Cedar Crest College in 2003 earned her Ph.D. in chemistry from Duke University in 2009 and pursued postdoctoral studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill within the Center for Integrative Chemical Biology and Drug Discovery. From 2011–2019, she served as a Wiess Instructor of Chemistry at Rice, teaching organic and medicinal chemistry. She joined the biosciences faculty this past year to help teach biochemistry. She received the George R. Brown Award for Superior Teaching in 2018 and the Nicolas Salgo Distinguished Teacher Award in 2019.
RICE UNIVERSITY FACULTY AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN UNIVERSITY SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

**Keith Cooper** is the L. John and Ann H. Doerr Professor in Computational Engineering at Rice. His primary appointment is in the Department of Computer Science, with a courtesy appointment in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. He serves as chair of the Department of Computational and Applied Mathematics at Rice and as co-director of the Ken Kennedy Institute for Information Technology.

RICE UNIVERSITY FACULTY AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN PROFESSIONAL SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

**Fred Oswald**, a professor of psychological sciences and management and the Herbert S. Autrey Chair in Social Sciences, has served in a number of national professional leadership roles. His extensive research, publications and grants address testing and selection in employment, educational and military contexts; workforce readiness and school-to-work transitions; and AI and machine learning as they apply to testing and assessment.

RICE UNIVERSITY FACULTY AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH, TEACHING AND SERVICE

**Kirsten Ostherr** is the Gladys Louise Fox Professor of English and Medical Humanities at Rice, where she is a media scholar, health researcher and technology analyst. She is founder and director of the Medical Humanities program (2016–present) and the Medical Futures Lab (2012–present).
THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING OFFICES:
Alumni Relations
Faculty Senate’s Committee on Teaching
Graduate Award Selection Committee
Office of Institutional Effectiveness
Office of Public Affairs
Office of the Registrar
STC Award Selection Committee

THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS:
Rick Barrera
Mauricio Benitez
Ashley Booher
Alex Byrd
Gloria Carrera
Sarah Curtiss
Hope Gatliff
Frank Geurts
Brian Gibson
Bridget Gorman
Clark Haptonstall
Ryan Kirksey
Jeffrey Kripal
David Leebron
Nancy Penner
Caroline Quenemoen
Renata Ramos
Rebecca Sharp Sanchez
Justin Schilke
Angela Thompson
Linda Torres
Ted Walker
Cynthia Wilson
Jennifer Wilson