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Berezina Earns University's Top Online Teaching Honor

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Berezina Earns University's Top Online Teaching Honor

March 24 event to feature latest Paragon Award winner, showcase innovative online teaching strategies

MARCH 19, 2021 BY **PAM STARLING**

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Katerina Berezina, UM assistant professor of nutrition and hospitality management, demonstrates a virtual reality headset that allows travel and tourism professionals to offer customers a visual experience of a destination before they book a trip. Berezina is being honored with the 2021 Paragon Award for Excellence in Distance Teaching to acknowledge her efforts to apply creative uses of educational technologies in her online classrooms. Photo by Sarah Sapp/School of Applied Sciences

OXFORD, Miss. – Last March, when the beginning of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic hit the state, faculty at the **University of Mississippi** began swiftly converting live courses to an online format that allowed students to keep learning and progressing toward graduation.

As they look back over the past year, faculty and staff in the UM **Office of Academic Outreach**, home of **Ole Miss Online**, are recognizing faculty members who went above and beyond in applying creative uses of educational technologies in their online classrooms while maintaining quality and engagement.

This includes awarding the Paragon Award for Excellence in Distance Teaching. Although the award is given annually to highlight online faculty, this year's winner and nominees faced unprecedented circumstances and rose to the challenge, said April Thompson, UM director of academic outreach.

"The necessity to offer outstanding learning opportunities for UM students in safe but meaningful ways makes this year's award a special acknowledgement of the huge strides faculty made while championing the cause of learning," Thompson said.

This year's award winner, Katerina Berezina, is an assistant professor of nutrition and hospitality management in the **School of Applied Sciences**. She will be honored at an online ceremony during the third annual "Toolbox Talks" virtual event on Wednesday (March 24).

"Toolbox Talks" is for UM online faculty who are interested in learning from fellow online instructors as they share five-minute presentations with ideas, techniques and tools that have proven successful in their courses. The virtual event is set for 10:30 a.m. to noon.

Some of the classroom tools Berezina will discuss stem from her idea to include student input in course design as well as "chunking" topics to help students fully immerse in learning the subject matter.

A love of all things adventure and travel are what originally brought Berezina into the field of hospitality management. Over the years, she has seen exciting changes in the technology of the business that have kept her interested in the industry.

As a young adult in her hometown of Zarechniy, Russia, Berezina worked at a travel agency helping others book trips to exciting locations while she attended Penza State University.

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Campus Briefs

Civil Engineering Professor Receives Most-Cited Paper Award

OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

Looking for an opportunity to learn all that she could about the latest technologies, Berezina moved to the United States in 2008 to attend the University of Delaware and pursue a master's degree in hospitality information management.

"It was a rare academic combination to focus on the industry but also the technology that was changing the way the business was done at the time," Berezina said. "When I joined this industry, we had huge price catalogs that showed photos of hotels, and very quickly we moved from reservations done by email to online reservations."

"The future keeps bringing even more new systems to make the customer service experience as seamless as possible."



Katerina Berezina shows off her trophy for this year's Paragon Award for Excellence in Distance Teaching. Submitted photo

Everything changed for Berezina while pursuing her master's degree. She loved the field and enjoyed the scholarly exchange with faculty and fellow students.

"I really enjoyed the academic life," she recalled. "I started working on research with my professors, attending conferences and ultimately decided to work on my doctorate at the University of Florida."

Berezina completed her doctorate in 2014 and began teaching at the University of South Florida, in Sarasota. She arrived at Ole Miss in January 2019 to teach in the university's new [online Master of Science in Hospitality Management program](#).

Her award-winning course, NHM 676: Advanced Hospitality Information Technology, was one of the first classes she began crafting to teach online. Many students in the course are professionals hailing from a variety of locations around the country.

Morgan Sears, a graduate student in the program, is director of sales and marketing for the Hyatt Regency hotel in Orlando.

"I work in hotel sales, where technology and trends within the industry are an important aspect we use to expand on how we sell the hotel to clients," Sears said. "Dr. Berezina's course helped me gain confidence in having conversations with my general manager, as well as owners, about what was trending in technology and how it could benefit or hurt our hotel."

One of the goals Berezina has in the course is to bring the latest reservation and booking technology to the classroom so that students can see what is inside the various systems to make themselves familiar with how they work.

"Overall, it gives students perspective, seeing the various programs and their core functionality, so that even if they work with a different system, they will know the inner workings and how these tools work in general," she said.

Using a method called "chunking," Berezina created an online environment to immerse students in the different technologies available in the field while making sure each topic was comprehended.

"I wanted smooth, interesting, interactive and engaging learning experiences for each student, so I created all-inclusive online modules for each week of the course that contained all materials that students needed to study on a given week," she said.

The weekly modules included a combination of mini-lectures, understanding check questions, discussions, polls, external videos, academic and/or professional articles, and assignments.

They also contained a mix of speaker videos, including her own lectures as well as external videos. She allowed students to discuss their points of view on topics and readings, and included interactive projects to keep students engaged.

The idea of keeping students engaged is what led Berezina to ask for students' input on course topics that were relevant and important for professionals in the industry to help shape the course.

"Navigation, structure and communication were highly important to me in designing the course," she said. "At the same time, I did not want to make the class too 'prescriptive' and aspired to leave room for students to explore the content on their own and engage with the material."

When the class syllabus was released at the beginning of the semester, Berezina assigned topics to half the weeks and left the second half of the semester open for idea submission.

"During the first week, students received an assignment to explore hospitality technology trends by researching academic and professional literature," she said. "Once the submissions came in, I prepared a survey that included a list of all trends discovered by students and asked students to rate their interest in each topic."

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"Students then indicated their top two preferences for a trend that they would like to further explore and develop into their term project. I finalized the course schedule using students' feedback on the topics they were most interested in learning about."

This approach to course planning gave students a feeling of involvement and ownership of their own education, she said.

Berezina's dedication to her students did not stop in the classroom, said Mary Lea Moore, assistant director of academic outreach.

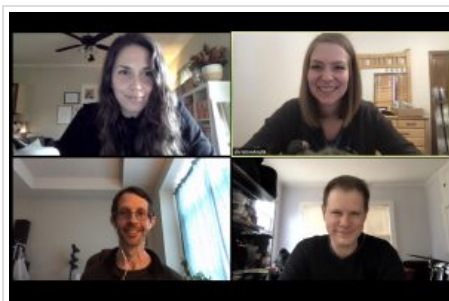
"Dr. Berezina's dedication continues each semester beyond the virtual classroom into students' professional lives," she said. "She takes advantage of available technology and simulations available in the hospitality industry and exposes students to these real-world applications."

Berezina said that her goal in each course is to build a bridge for each student and to bring positive learning opportunities that can change their lives.

"When the bridge is built, I want to see my students knowledgeable, inspired and highly motivated for their careers," she said.

"I try to make that impact on my students' lives so they will become more confident and better prepared for their future."

To learn more about Berezina's online course build, as well as creative ideas from other Ole Miss online faculty, register for the "Toolbox Talks" event [here](#).



UM music faculty members (clockwise from top left) Nave Graham, instructor of flute; Christine Kralik, instructor of cello; David Carlisle, adjunct instructor of percussion; and Michael Rowlett, associate professor of music, meet via Zoom to discuss changes to one of the university's core arts electives, Introduction to Music, focusing on how students experience music by building listening skills and critical thinking. All across campus, faculty members have adapted technologies and approaches to allow Ole Miss students to continue learning and progressing toward their degrees despite the pandemic.

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