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5-11-2018

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### Recommended Citation

Smith, Edwin B., "Three Liberal Arts Professors Honored for Excellence in Teaching" (2018). *University of Mississippi News*. 5217.

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## Three Liberal Arts Professors Honored for Excellence in Teaching

Award recipients come from fields of classics, public policy leadership and modern languages

MAY 11, 2018 BY EDWIN B. SMITH



Dean Lee Cohen (right), congratulates College of Liberal Arts faculty (from left), Nidhi Vij Mali, Irene Kaufmann and Molly Pasco-Pranger for their outstanding teacher awards. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Communications

OXFORD, Miss. – Three University of Mississippi professors were honored Friday (May 11) by the **College of Liberal Arts** for their excellence in teaching.

Nidhi Vij Mali, assistant professor of **public policy leadership**, received the Howell Family Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award. Named after alumni donors Dr. Norris Howell and Lynne Thomas Howell, both of Ripley, the endowment provides funds to recognize the outstanding teacher of the year within the college.

The other two honorees are Irene Kaufmann, lecturer of **Spanish**, who received the Outstanding Instructor of the Year Award; and Molly Pasco-Pranger, chair and associate professor of **classics**, who was presented the Cora Lee Graham Award for Outstanding Teaching of Freshmen.

“We commend Ms. Kaufmann, Dr. Pasco-Pranger and Dr. Mali for their outstanding dedication to teaching and service to our students,” said Lee Cohen, UM liberal arts dean. “These awards symbolize the importance of teaching excellence to our college’s mission. It is an honor and a privilege to recognize this year’s recipients.”

All three honorees will be recognized during Commencement exercises Saturday (May 12) in The Pavilion at Ole Miss. Donald L. Dyer, associate dean of faculty and academic affairs for the College of Liberal Arts, praised the exceptional teaching provided by the faculty members.

“Excellence in teaching is at the heart of what we do as an institution of higher learning, something we value and hold in the highest regard,” he said. “The faculty, who receive these annual awards, represent the best the college has to offer in this regard.”

Each of the recipients expressed gratitude for their recognition.

“The award is fuel for encouragement, appreciation and gratitude,” said Mali, who joined the university’s public policy leadership faculty in 2016. “It gives me confidence in what I do every day and grateful that the students appreciate it.

“To have received the award within the second year of my teaching, it has been a very humbling experience.”

Pasco-Pranger said she is “deeply touched and humbled” to have been singled out for this award among the college’s excellent teaching faculty.

“I am flattered and honored to receive this award,” Kaufmann said. “It warms my heart to learn that there were students and/or colleagues who took the time and initiative to nominate me.”

Recipients also shared their philosophies of teaching.

“My students and their words of appreciation for the efforts that we put in as teachers are what are most rewarding for me,” said Mali, who also received the Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award from the Syracuse University Graduate School in 2016 while earning her doctorate.

“Teaching a language is my instrument to help students open their minds to a wider world,” Kaufmann said. “Through learning a new language, students become more curious and respectful of other cultures.

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"There is no better feeling than seeing my students at the end of each semester sharing experiences and having conversations in a new language, something many of them had never thought they would be able to do."

Pasco-Pranger said she loves helping students in their own process of discovery, whether it's finding a new body of knowledge, or their own interests and talents, or new ways to think about the world around them.

"I am always glad to introduce new students to classics," she said. "But even more broadly, I think teaching first-year students, being among their first introductions to the life of the university, helping them negotiation the sometimes rocky transition between high school and college, can make a huge difference in their success."

Nomination letters noted why each recipient deserved her award.

One writer who nominated Mali wrote, "She does more than just go above and beyond. Besides her amazing teaching abilities, Dr. Mali's personality inspires me and other students to be the best version of ourselves."

Another of Mali's nomination letters said, "she made herself available to me 24/7 to get help. She learned more about me as a person and my home life than anyone else at the university."

"(Ms. Kaufmann) cares about your education, and that shows in how she responds to questions," wrote an anonymous student. "The professor is amazing and she will help you with whatever you need."

Another nomination letter praised Pasco-Pranger as "one of the most approachable professors I have had who has had a major impact on my career as a student as well as my development as an individual."

One of Pasco-Pranger's former students wrote, "She held me to the highest standards while also providing the support I needed to meet those standards. Now that I'm an alumna, she regularly reaches out to me: to check on my professional progress, to invite me back to events hosted by the classics department and to meet up with me when I'm visiting Oxford."



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