

March 12, 2020

Report on the Selection of Distinguished Teaching Award Recipients

The Committee on Teaching has selected four recipients for the Distinguished Teaching Award for 2020: **Nadia Ellis**, Associate Professor of English, **Marla Feller**, Professor of Biological Sciences; **Alexander Paulin**, Lecturer of Mathematics; **Brody Reiman**, Associate Professor of Sculpture.

Nadia Ellis, Associate Professor of English, has “inspired, challenged, and nurtured students at all levels,” begins the dossier written by Chair Bryan Wagner. Not only is she characterized as “brilliant” and an “attentive” instructor but also as a “trusted mentor and role model whose erudition is leavened by her passion for the material at hand.” On top of this, his comments continue with praise that her lectures are “eye-opening” and “mind-opening.” Her teaching evaluations are always filled with superlatives like “best class in the English Department,” “the BEST class I’ve taken at Cal,” “best English professor,” “by far my favorite professor,” “the best professor that I have ever had.” Her classes are described as “magical,” “thought provoking,” “fast paced,” “inspirational,” “challenging,” “astounding,” and “enthraling.” In the words of one student: “Wow. Just wow.” In the words of another: “AMAZING! AMAZING! AMAZING!” And “by teaching about identity, diaspora, monolithic whiteness, decalage and racial objectification,” another student explains, “Professor Ellis has made me a better English student and a better person. From this course I have gained insight into experiences that would be otherwise inaccessible to me, and I have learned how to make my own experiences accessible to others.” Ellis has taught “extraordinary courses” at every level of the curriculum in the English Department, from a lower-level lecture comparing music, art and literature by immigrant populations, designed to fulfill the university’s American Cultures graduation requirement; to undergraduate seminars including courses on “The Art of Black Diaspora” and “The Urban Postcolonial”; to creative writing workshops in prose nonfiction; to graduate seminars on “Black + Queer Studies” and “Caribbean Literature and Culture.” Across these varied courses, the student praise is always the same in terms of “intensity” and her “generosity.” Graduate students, in particular, describe how Ellis’s careful syllabus design make it possible to “teach an entire field in a matter of months,” bringing both clarity and an up-to-date survey of current research without overloading the course. They also praise Ellis for bringing her own scholarship into her teaching in ways that promote “genuine as opposed to performative engagement” between teacher and students. Members of the Committee on teaching found Ellis’s teaching to be “passionate” with “charismatic skill” that easily directed the class. As her dossier states, she is a “gifted teacher who brings her curiosity, passion, and scholarly commitments to bear on each and every one of her classes,” and the Committee agrees wholeheartedly.

Marla Feller, Professor of Biological Sciences, is an “exceptional teacher, a respected scientist and role model, and a kind, generous person devoted to student success,” according to Co-Chairs Donald Rio and David Drubin. In the classroom, she is described as an “ebullient” teacher who “revels in sharing her knowledge and inspiring students.” Students share that opinion as they appreciate her “enthusiasm and her clear explanations” as she “relates course material to real life applications.” With a teaching load consistently “above the required effort” of the department, her courses are considered to be challenging and demanding, yet students describe her personally as “kind, helpful, and motivating,” and as one student notes, “she seems like she really cares about her students and only wants the best for us, taking time to explain each concept...” Further, Feller is described as “joyful while teaching” and her “enthusiasm is contagious.” In BIO 1A, which can often have 700+ students, she uses innovative activities, like “consolidating cutting-edge literature and current multimedia materials” in order to keep the material “engaging and relevant in a rapidly evolving

field.” The BIO 1A students “really enjoyed how often she incorporated NPR interviews and segments to show real-world applications of the things we are learning.” These students feel her presentation of “engaging lectures through her visuals and videos [make] use of multisensory learning,” enabling them to better comprehend dense material. In addition to Feller’s multifaceted teaching experience, she is also a leader in curriculum development and revitalization, helping to keep learning opportunities relevant for students at all levels. She has not only “reinvigorated all **BIO 1A** lecture slides and notes and modernized the lectures by incorporating multimedia clips to embellish fundamental concepts” but also “advocated for and led the redesign and update of several labs. Fuller also excels at research mentoring where she works hard to “make students not just knowledge consumers, but knowledge *contributors*.” To this point, she has advised many undergraduate researchers in her lab, several of whom were recipients of MCB awards for outstanding, noteworthy work done in her lab. With her graduate trainees, her advice to “present themselves professionally, execute their research methodically, and communicate their work effectively so they will have successful scientific careers” resulted in Feller being recognized as a UCB Distinguished Faculty Mentor Award in 2018. Members of the Committee on Teaching found her teaching during classroom observation to be “energetic” and to demonstrate complete command of the class, yet lively as she imbued “pop culture references” into her lectures that made the material relatable. She has already been recognized by MCB with an ‘Excellence in Teaching Award.’ The Committee on Teaching is very pleased to recognize her with the campus’s Distinguished Teaching Award.

Alexander Paulin, Lecturer in Mathematics, is “among the very best instructors” on the Berkeley campus, states Chair Michael Hutchings, and “stands out” among a group of “very talented instructors” who have the difficult job of teaching calculus to freshmen, described as an “extraordinarily difficult pedagogical challenge.” With enrollments that often exceed 600 students, who represent quite varied levels of preparation, Dr. Paulin is always prepared for the challenge and has an average teaching evaluation score of 6.3, far above the averages of ladder rank faculty in his department. As one colleague states, “clarity and organization” are musts, but Paulin goes on also to “teach on multiple levels, communicating basic computational skills, problem-solving strategy, theory, conceptual thinking, a scientific attitude, connections between mathematical machinery and applications, and on and on,” and to do so with skill and composure. His students claim that his lectures are always “easy to follow” and that he “clearly puts a lot of effort into making sure we understand concepts.” Students also state that Dr. Paulin excels in providing many resources outside of the classroom such as online lectures and practice exams and that his “lecture notes and video would be promptly posted” after every class.” One student claimed that he thinks Paulin was the “only professor I have ever had who held office hours every day to help students,” and another stated, “I have never met a teacher who is so willing to give up his time to teach his students (I mean like 10 hrs. of office hours a week is insane).” Dr. Paulin’s office hours are indeed held every day for two hours, when he typically sees 50+ students participating. This is also an extension of his classroom management and GSI support, which requires coordination of 20+ GSIs for each course. Members of the Committee on Teaching found his classes were “fluid in style” and perfectly choreographed and that the material was “engaging, fun, and inspiring.” A frequent student comment is that “Professor Paulin is the best professor I have had here at Berkeley”; the Committee agrees that he is one of our campus’s pedagogical luminaries.

Brody Reiman, Associate Professor of Sculpture, teaches courses that Chair Greg Niemeyer says “stand out as exceptional” in a department that typically earns good student evaluations. Not only does she stand out in her studio classes, he continues, but she is a “prolific artist whose creative research continually reinvents the Americana Landscape painting,” and her students “benefit from

this innovation.” Further, Professor Reiman teaches students to “seize the potential for expression and reflection at the boundaries of different materials and methods.” With assignments that are “conceptually generous”, so that one student might translate a prompt one way, but another might explore a completely different interpretation. Professor Reiman has also greatly impacted the curriculum of the Art Practice department, by introducing several curricular changes to the undergraduate program through two new courses. These courses allow students to enter a more interdisciplinary space to “discover and build their own creative vocabularies,” and they lead students to “overcome creative or material challenges in the studio” but also enable them to “connect with intended audiences and identify realistic careers in the Visual Arts.” She also led the charge in restructuring the curriculum to make the path towards graduation more feasible. This type of dedication and change-making increased the overall learning goals for the department and influenced Art Practice, in general, to be no longer seen as an easy major but as a disciplined one. In addition, Reiman’s undergraduate student recommendations spoke of her guidance as “unparalleled” and “engaged” and “focused.” She was referred to as an active listener who “expanded” student thinking and “heightened ambitions”; several students described her as providing support as well “critical feedback, inspiration, and scholarly direction on the political implications of students’ artworks.” She is a well sought-after committee member for graduate students, as her mentorship is described as “magic” and her students “often model her critical but caring and enthusiastic response to artwork. Professor Reiman’s classes are described as not just classes, “but an inclusive and supportive environment” for all. The Committee on Teaching members who visited Professor Reiman’s classes were thoroughly impressed with her collaborative, yet understated approach as well as her general “presence” that is “low-key, but authoritative.” Reiman’s colleagues, students, and the Committee all view her overall pedagogy as creating a community that nurtures, inspires, and encourages in the most collaborative way.

The recipients of the Distinguished Teaching Award will be honored at the campus’s Distinguished Teaching Award Ceremony on August 26, 2020.

Glynda A. Hull, Chair
Committee on Teaching