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## Laurier recognizes outstanding teachers with 2015 Awards for Teaching Excellence

WATERLOO – Each year, Wilfrid Laurier University honours teachers with **Awards for Teaching Excellence** to recognize those who have gone above and beyond to inspire and educate students. This year's recipients are:

- **Bruce McKay**, associate professor, Department of Psychology (full-time faculty category)
- **Kaylena Ehgoetz Martens**, contract academic staff, Department of Psychology (part-time contract academic staff category)
- **Nichole Scheerer**, teaching assistant and PhD candidate, Department of Psychology (Teaching Assistant Award of Excellence – graduate student category)
- **Parvina Shodieva**, instructional assistant, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry (Teaching Assistant Award of Excellence – undergraduate student category)

"What stands out to me about each of these extraordinary teachers is not simply their excellent teaching, but the fact that they do not rest on their laurels. They constantly explore new ways to teach their students and inspire them to reach their full academic potential," said **Pat Rogers**, associate vice-president: Teaching and Learning at Laurier. "Clearly, we can boast that behind every Laurier scientist is a brilliant science teacher."

### **Bruce McKay, associate professor, Department of Psychology**

McKay is consistently praised for his outstanding teaching practices, dedication to innovating his classroom and raising the profile of the Faculty of Science at Laurier. Since arriving at Laurier in 2008, McKay has helped increase enrolment in his Drugs and Behaviour course from 150 students to over 800 students per year, resulting in increased enthusiasm from students for upper-year Behavioural Neuroscience and Cognitive Neuroscience courses at Laurier.

In his letter of support, Paul E. Mallet, associate psychology professor, commended McKay for his ability to make his daunting biopsychology courses engaging and memorable for students with no science background. Mallet also described McKay's expertise in his field, noting that he published his own textbook for his Drugs and Behaviour course after finding that existing textbooks did not meet his requirements.

"Bruce manages to organize and present his course material in a manner that leaves no one behind, yet is still interesting and advanced enough for the top students," wrote Mallet. "Bruce's lessons... make course content relevant and obvious to [students] instead of using abstract concepts in a textbook."

McKay is widely celebrated by students for his inventive teaching and for going beyond to help students understand complicated course materials with humour and creativity.

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"Dr. McKay is well known for his biopsychology rap videos – a bonus assignment for students wishing to earn extra marks," wrote one student. "Students are asked to produce rap videos with lyrics strictly discussing biopsychology concepts. Dr. McKay applies 21<sup>st</sup> century learning methods to motivate students to master challenging course material."

McKay is committed to providing students with the best possible experience to serve them well in the future.

"At Laurier, we have some really wonderful resources to help people become great teachers – with their support I've been able to do the best I can to engage and inspire students in learning," said McKay. "It's so enjoyable to be with students while they're learning. I love doing it, so I'm very appreciative of this award and recognition from my students and colleagues."

McKay will receive his award **June 9 at 9:30 a.m.** at the Faculty of Science convocation ceremony.

### **Kaylena Ehgoetz Martens, contract academic staff, Department of Psychology**

Since starting her undergraduate degree at Laurier in 2006, Ehgoetz Martens has demonstrated excellence at every level and has received numerous national and international awards and scholarships. Ehgoetz Martens showed an early interest in teaching as a teaching assistant and a Students Offering Support leader, and is now instructing at Laurier Brantford's Faculty of Human and Social Sciences while completing her PhD.

In his nomination letter, Colin Ellard, Kaylena's PhD co-supervisor and associate professor at University of Waterloo, noted Ehgoetz Martens' ability to communicate complex technical information simply. Kaylena is also credited with playing a pivotal role in research activities, outreach and awareness building during her time at the Sun Life Financial Movement Disorders Research and Rehabilitation Centre, as well as becoming a mentor for students.

"Kaylena not only has an intuitive grasp of how best to help an individual student, but she manages to do so with the right mix of gentleness and authority that will elicit their best work," wrote Ellard. "When students are describing their problems, Kaylena is always one of the first to understand what's needed and quickly determines a comprehensive plan to address the situation."

Ehgoetz Martens is commended for her enthusiasm and passion in the classroom, creating a positive environment that fosters the success of each student.

"Kaylena made it very clear from day one that she was going to be very approachable and eager to help her students succeed in the course," wrote one student. "She encouraged us to drop by her office so she could get to know our names and understand our strengths and weaknesses. After the semester was over, she kept in contact - I really appreciated this quality of Kaylena, she is determined to see us succeed at university."

Ehgoetz Martens challenges herself to be innovative in her teaching, creating opportunities for hands-on activities, group projects, and for students to provide critical feedback to the course.

"It is truly a wonderful feeling to know that all the time and effort that goes into planning and creating fun and interactive lectures is of value to the students and useful for their learning," said Ehgoetz Martens. "To be nominated and recognized by my colleagues and students as an exceptional instructor is by far my biggest accomplishment. I am thrilled that students enjoy my lectures and courses as much as I enjoy teaching them."

Ehgoetz Martens will receive her award **June 9 at 9:30 a.m.** during the Faculty of Science convocation ceremony.

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### **Nichole Scheerer, teaching assistant and PhD candidate, Department of Psychology**

Scheerer has become a vital teaching assistant in Laurier's Psychology department since arriving at Laurier in 2005 for her undergraduate degree. She consistently receives above average student evaluations and is praised for her dedication to helping students succeed in the demanding Research Methods and Statistics course. Scheerer is also a student, completing her PhD in Cognitive Neuroscience.

In his letter of support, Jeffery Jones, Psychology professor and Scheerer's PhD supervisor, praises her competency as a teaching assistant. Jones commends her ability to mentor to students, her talent as a presenter and her broad-based knowledge of Cognitive Neuroscience.

"Nichole is destined to make a significant impact on the field of cognitive neuroscience and on the lives of students she teaches," wrote Jones. "She is incredibly generous with her time, her knowledge and experience. Each student in my lab from undergraduate to PhD is indebted for her guidance."

Scheerer is well known by students and faculty for her exam prep classes and the additional time she devotes to reviewing important material with students. Students go out of their way to schedule labs to ensure Scheerer will be their TA.

"I found Nikki's teaching style so effective that I sought her assistance multiple times a week," wrote one student. "I believe that my final course mark was a direct by-product of Nikki's effectiveness as a TA."

For Scheerer, teaching has been as equally rewarding for her as it has been for the students and faculty.

"I am extremely grateful for those who took the time and effort to nominate me for this award," said Scheerer. "Working as a TA has been a rewarding and enjoyable experience for me, so it actually feels strange receiving an award for it. Over the past few years I have had the privilege of working with many amazing students and professors, and it makes me very happy to know that they benefitted from the experience as much as I did."

Scheerer will receive her award **June 9 at 9:30 a.m.** during the Faculty of Science convocation ceremony.

### **Parvina Shodieva, instructional assistant, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry**

Shodieva is a source of inspiration and encouragement to fellow undergraduate students in the chemistry, organic chemistry, physics and computer sciences programs. Shodieva is a talented instructional assistant whose enthusiasm for instructing across multiple disciplines is appreciated – a challenge that many avoid due to the complexity of mastering such diverse subject matter.

Shodieva is recognized for her professionalism and dedication to teaching as an undergraduate student. In her nomination letter, Sherilyn Van De Wynckel, lab coordinator in the Chemistry and Biology department, lauds Shodieva for her consistent commitment to going above and beyond by preparing detailed notes before labs and proactively engaging students in the material to ensure their comprehension and success.

"Parvina has an excellent knowledge of the subject matter, is extremely effective in her IA role, contributes to lab development and provides outstanding student mentorship and support," wrote Van De Wynckel. "Parvina has been an immense source of help and inspiration to Laurier students and their journey in the sciences."

Shodieva is highly regarded for her ability to teach concepts in simplified terms to ensure students understand, and for making herself available to students who have questions or are struggling with material.

"Parvina's support, from responding to emails to answering questions from different angles, helped reduce stress and gave me a better foundation of what was required from the lab," wrote a current student. "Parvina is kind and helpful and always encouraged us to ask more questions."

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Shodieva sees education and teaching as her contribution to making the world a better place. She hopes to inspire students by acting as a system of support and enthusiasm.

"I am sincerely grateful to have been selected to receive this award. It has been such an incredible experience for me to work as an IA these last four years," said Shodieva. "I want to express my gratitude to the chemistry supervisors and students who have been a source of inspiration for me."

Shodieva will receive her award at Laurier's **fall convocation**.

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