



Kyra Jones, Educational Developer: Student Programming
Teaching & Learning, Wilfrid Laurier University
519-884-0710 ext. 4736 or kjones@wlu.ca

Kevin Crowley, Director
Communications & Public Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University
519-884-0710 ext. 3070 or kcrowley@wlu.ca

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Laurier recognizes student teachers with awards of excellence

WATERLOO – For the first time, Wilfrid Laurier University will recognize three outstanding student teachers with the university's Laurier Student Teaching Awards of Excellence.

Formerly known as the Teaching Assistant Awards of Excellence, the award program was redesigned in 2017 to recognize the diversity of teaching roles performed by Laurier students. This year, the program has expanded from two categories to three.

Recipients of the 2018 Laurier Student Teaching Awards of Excellence include:

- **Undergraduate category:** Camellia Bissessar, Faculty of Music
- **Master's category:** Laura Neil, Faculty of Arts (Communication Studies)
- **Doctoral category:** Courtney Arseneau, Faculty of Science (Psychology)

All three recipients will be honoured during Laurier's Teaching Award reception May 25 and will receive their awards at upcoming convocation ceremonies.

CAMELLIA BISSESSAR

As an educational assistant working to support students within Accessible Learning, a volunteer in the music departments of local elementary and secondary schools, and an ambassador for educational recruitment initiatives in the Faculty of Music, Bissessar has made a significant mark during her time as an undergraduate student.

Driven to become a teacher from a very young age, Bissessar's passions intersected in grade eight when she took a leading role in her school's music council. Today, under Bissessar's leadership as co-president of the Laurier Students' Association of Music Educators (SAME), the university group has coordinated conferences and community outreach initiatives dedicated to expanding the reach of music education beyond the campus and into the community.

"Being nominated for this award has allowed me to reflect on my teaching philosophies and delve deeply into my passion for education," said Bissessar. "I am so happy to be recognized for my efforts and contributions, and I feel an immense sense of pride in being able to represent Laurier's Faculty of Music through my achievements."

In 2016 and 2017, Bissessar developed and delivered multi-day music workshops for the Junior University Multidisciplinary Program (JUMP) that saw several local elementary school students fully immersed in the university experience at Laurier's Waterloo campus. She is returning to JUMP this summer as the music coordinator.

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LAURA NEIL

Over the course of her undergraduate and graduate studies, Neil has built a reputation as a dedicated teacher, mentor, and researcher in her department among senior leadership, peers and students. Neil takes a student-centred approach as a teaching assistant, accessible learning tutor, and departmental graduate representative, with the hope of empowering students and inspiring meaningful collaboration.

"I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to teach at Laurier over the past four years because this role has allowed me to grow as both an educator and as an individual," said Neil. "While I am grateful for this accolade, the greatest reward has come from mentoring, supporting and inspiring the minds of Golden Hawks. For that, I am forever grateful."

Neil is a strong advocate for active learning and works to transform the classroom into a role-playing environment. Neil says that after working in a co-operative, experiential environment, students report feelings of heightened interest in course material, as they can translate content to scenarios they may face in their future careers.

As one student noted in her nomination package, "Laura made my first semester at Laurier amazing and changed my perspective on school. I was very skeptical about starting a new life in a new town; however, with all of the assistance that Laura offered me, I was able to adapt [from high school to university] quite easily."

COURTNEY ARSENEAU

As a course instructor, research supervisor, and teaching assistant in Laurier's Department of Psychology, Arseneau builds trust and inspires personal growth in her students by being approachable in the classroom and lab, intentional in her course development, and responsive to her students' needs.

"I appreciate the chance to reflect on and develop my teaching practices, as it ultimately promotes excellence in the student learning experience," said Arseneau. "My teaching approach is inspired by the fact that students show me time and time again that they are invested in their learning and care about the contributions they make in and out of the classroom."

Arseneau provides opportunities for students to apply their skills and knowledge to topics and issues that are personally relevant. The impact of this personalized teaching approach, according to Arseneau, is a marked increase in students' pride, ownership, and understanding of their learning.

In addition to her contributions in the classroom, Arseneau has helped to develop an online community psychology course (PS 282) and has supervised undergraduate student groups in a student-community research partnership with the [Laurier Centre for Community Research, Learning and Action](#).

Laurier also recently announced the winners of its newly retitled 2018 Donald F. Morgenson Faculty Awards for Teaching Excellence. Read about the award winners in the recent [faculty Teaching Excellence Awards media release](#).