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Michigan Distinguished Professors of the Year Announced

Lansing, MI – Three Michigan professors have been selected as Distinguished Professor of the Year Award recipients from Michigan’s 15 public universities. The recipients were chosen based on their involvement with undergraduate students, innovative learning approaches, and contributions to their community and profession. The awards will be presented by the Academic Affairs Officers of the Michigan Association of State Universities at the 2026 Distinguished Professor of the Year Awards luncheon in Lansing on Friday, April 10.

The Michigan Distinguished Professor of the Year award recognizes the outstanding contributions and dedication exhibited by the faculty from Michigan’s 15 public universities to the education of undergraduate students. Each university was invited to nominate a faculty member who has had a significant impact on undergraduate student learning through various activities, including classroom instruction, applied research, experiential learning and mentoring. The 2026 recipients are: Ian Mull of Central Michigan University, Dr. Sanjivan Manoharan of Grand Valley State University, and Dr. Shelly Schreier of the University of Michigan.

“This year’s honorees reflect the highest standards of teaching excellence across Michigan’s public universities,” said Dr. Daniel Hurley, chief executive officer at the Michigan Association of State Universities. “Their contributions to undergraduate education, student mentorship, and academic innovation distinguish them as leaders in higher education. Their work and dedication exemplify the very best of the teaching, research, and service missions of our state universities.”

The 2026 recipients are introduced below:

Ian Mull, Lecturer in Fashion, Interior Design and Merchandising at Central Michigan University

Ian Mull is a dedicated educator whose work exemplifies a sustained commitment to undergraduate education through innovative teaching, experiential learning, and individualized mentorship. For more than a decade, he has worked closely with hundreds of undergraduate students, supporting their academic progress, professional development, and personal growth while positioning them “not as passive recipients of knowledge, but as emerging professionals, creative leaders, and agents of positive change.”

Central to Mull’s pedagogy is what he describes as “design leadership,” an approach that extends learning beyond the classroom into immersive, real-world experiences. As faculty

advisor for the Threads Fashion Show, the largest student-run event at CMU, he leads a “living laboratory” in which students assume responsibility for every aspect of production, from creative direction to marketing and event coordination. This hallmark experience models the “substantive, experiential learning” that prepares students for professional success while cultivating leadership, accountability, and collaboration.

Mull further advances undergraduate education through his leadership of registered student organizations, including as founding advisor of the National Retail Federation student chapter at CMU. Through these initiatives, he extends classroom learning into national and global professional spaces, from Detroit to New York Fashion Week to Paris, where students gain firsthand insight into the complexities of the fashion industry and develop confidence as contributors within it.

His teaching is grounded in a commitment to “experiential, industry-relevant, real-world learning as a catalyst for empowerment,” paired with scaffolded, inquiry-driven instruction that builds agency and professional identity. By integrating emerging technologies such as virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and 3D modeling into coursework, he ensures students are prepared for the evolving demands of “Industry 4.0” while also fostering empathetic and accountable leadership.

Beyond the classroom, Mull’s contributions include impactful service, community partnerships, and university-wide initiatives that enhance student experiences. His work consistently reflects a belief that transformative education occurs when students are challenged, supported, and empowered to navigate complexity with confidence—making his impact on undergraduate education both profound and far-reaching.

Mull is the author of numerous peer-reviewed journal articles and has delivered award-winning presentations at the International Textile and Apparel Association annual conference.

He received his bachelor’s degree in psychology from Michigan State University and his master’s degree in apparel product development & merchandising technology from CMU, where he has taught since 2012.

Dr. Sanjivan Manoharan, Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Grand Valley State University

An innovative and deeply committed educator, Dr. Manoharan’s work has transformed undergraduate engineering education through rigorous teaching, research-driven pedagogy, and sustained mentorship. Since joining Grand Valley in 2016, he has distinguished himself as “the kind of educator every institution hopes to have,” combining intellectual curiosity with an unwavering dedication to student success and growth.

Known for his ability to make complex engineering concepts accessible without oversimplifying them, Dr. Manoharan helps students build both confidence and competence in conceptually demanding courses such as thermodynamics, fluid mechanics, and heat transfer. His teaching is grounded in the belief that learning is not only about mastering content, but also about “connecting with students, cultivating curiosity, and promoting autonomy,” enabling them to become independent, lifelong learners.

Central to his approach is a commitment to experiential, hands-on learning. As faculty advisor to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, he guides students through ambitious, real-world projects, including NASA-sponsored design competitions. These transformative experiences require students to engage in the full engineering process – design, fabrication, and testing – while applying their knowledge to challenges with national and global relevance.

Dr. Manoharan's impact extends far beyond the classroom through individualized mentorship and undergraduate research. He has supervised numerous independent studies, co-authored peer-reviewed publications with undergraduate students, and mentored more than 50 students into graduate programs. His open-door approach and sustained investment in students' academic, professional, and personal development foster confidence, resilience, and a strong sense of professional identity.

A leader in teaching innovation, Dr. Manoharan integrates scholarship and instruction through federally funded research focused on student persistence, self-efficacy, and belonging. His work has secured more than \$3 million in support for undergraduate education and has led to evidence-based interventions that improve student success and expand access to high-impact learning experiences.

He has earned numerous awards for teaching excellence, including the 2024 Pew Teaching Excellence Award, NASA's 2024 STEM Outreach Award, and the Engineering Significant Influential Professor Award in 2019, 2022, and 2024.

Through his teaching, scholarship, and leadership, Dr. Manoharan prepares students not only as skilled engineers, but as collaborative problem-solvers who understand their role in addressing broader societal challenges—making his impact on undergraduate education both profound and enduring.

He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in aerospace engineering from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and his doctorate in mechanical engineering from the University of Cincinnati.

Dr. Shelly Schreier, Teaching Professor and Neil M. Kalter Collegiate Lecturer of Psychology at the University of Michigan

Dr. Schreier received her bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate in clinical psychology from the University of Michigan. A transformative educator whose distinguished career reflects an extraordinary commitment to undergraduate education, mentorship, and student success, Dr. Schreier has taught more than 26,000 students across large lectures, first-year seminars, and independent studies. She is widely recognized for her ability to "awaken joy in learning" and to create a positive, inspiring environment in which students feel seen, supported, and challenged.

Dr. Schreier is perhaps best known for her teaching of Introductory Psychology, a gateway course she has taught more than 60 times, where students develop critical thinking skills, learn to evaluate evidence, and gain a deeper appreciation for scientific inquiry. She meets students where they are, fosters learning environments that encourage risk-taking and persistence, and equips them with strategies to "learn how to learn." Her pedagogy emphasizes that setbacks are part of growth, modeling teaching and learning as an ongoing process while cultivating resilience, curiosity, and confidence.

One particularly innovative course she developed is Psychological Development Through Children's Literature, which uses classic picture books and novels to help students explore cognitive, social, and emotional development. Her "infectious joy" in teaching, combined with her gift for translating complex ideas from clinical and developmental psychology into relatable, actionable insights, enables students to connect course concepts to their own lives and future paths.

Dr. Schreier's impact extends well beyond the classroom through extensive individualized and experiential learning opportunities. She has taught 178 independent study courses and mentors students one-on-one as they explore personal and professional interests, connecting them with research labs, community organizations, and career pathways. Her mentorship helps students

translate curiosity into meaningful experiences that shape their academic and professional trajectories.

A leader in teaching innovation, she integrates evidence-based learning strategies into her courses, drawing on research to improve student outcomes and engagement. She also contributes broadly to undergraduate education through leadership in graduate student instructor training and has served on the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts Curriculum Committee and the President's Advisory Council.

She has been recognized with numerous teaching awards, including the 2023 Wilbert J. McKeachie Award for Excellence in Lecture-Based Teaching, the Michigan Daily "Best of Ann Arbor" Best Professor Award in 2016 and 2017, and the 2013 Golden Apple, the only teaching award bestowed by students that honors teachers who strive to not only disseminate knowledge but inspire and engage students in its pursuit. Dr. Schreier's profound and lasting impact is reflected in the countless students who credit her with building their confidence, shaping their career paths, and helping them become thoughtful, empathetic professionals.

The other nominees for the Distinguished Professor of the Year Award were:

Amanda Maher	Eastern Michigan University
Deirdre Fagan	Ferris State University
Edoardo Sarda	Lake Superior State University
Isaac Record	Michigan State University
Roger Woods	Michigan Technological University
Paul Truckey	Northern Michigan University
JoAnne West	Saginaw Valley State University
Amanda Esquivel	University of Michigan - Dearborn
Gregory Laurence	University of Michigan - Flint
Katie MacDonald	Wayne State University
Mert Atilhan	Western Michigan University

A photo of each award winner is available at [this link](#).

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About MASU

The Michigan Association of State Universities serves as the coordinating board for Michigan's 15 public universities, providing advocacy and fostering policy to maximize the collective value these institutions provide in serving the public interest and the State of Michigan.