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For More Information:
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Michigan Distinguished Professors of the Year Announced

Lansing, MI – A professor who discovered a new species and wrote free textbooks for students, a professor and community leader who established an after-school math program for students in Metro Detroit, and a professor who has adapted testing for the COVID-19 virus in wastewater, have been selected as Distinguished Professor of the Year Award recipients from Michigan’s 15 public universities. The award is presented by the Academic Affairs Officers of the Michigan Association of State Universities.

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, particularly classroom instruction, applied research, experiential learning, innovation and mentoring.

The 2021 recipients are: Dr. Thomas Werner of Michigan Technological University, Dr. Tami Sivy of Saginaw Valley State University and Dr. Yunus Zeytuncu of the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

“After 15 years, nominees for the award continue to bring new innovation and leadership to Michigan’s public universities and surrounding communities,” said Dr. Daniel J. Hurley, CEO of the Michigan Association of State Universities. “These professors show the highest dedication to student success, inspire their peers and community and continue to develop the young talent who advance Michigan’s prosperity.”

The 2021 recipients are introduced below:

Thomas Werner, Associate Professor of Genetics and Developmental Biology, Michigan Technological University

Dr. Thomas Werner is Associate Professor of genetics and developmental biology at Michigan Technological University, where he has taught since 2010. He received his M.S. in Biology from the Friedrich Schiller University Jena in Germany and his Ph.D. at Umea Center for Molecular Pathogenesis in Sweden.

CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY
LAKE SUPERIOR STATE UNIVERSITY

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY
NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY
SAGINAW VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-DEARBORN
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-FLINT
WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

THE MICHIGAN FIFTEEN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Dr. Werner teaches four different classes at Michigan Tech that he designed himself and is consistently ranked in the top 10 percent of instructors at the school. His passion for his work is infectious and he has won the Michigan Tech Distinguished Teaching Award twice during his tenure, a feat that only three other faculty members have accomplished in 70 years.

Nearly \$900,000 in funding has been allocated to Dr. Werner for his research on the evolution and development of complex color patterns and mushroom toxin resistance in fruit flies, and he supported his undergraduate research assistants with grants from the National Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation. He also discovered a new species of fruit fly on a trip in the Upper Peninsula and named it *Amiota tessa*, after his very successful undergraduate student Tessa Steenwinkel. Dr. Werner has also co-authored a two-book series of free, open-source textbooks on fruit flies with Ms. Steenwinkel. These open source textbooks have been downloaded on all seven continents, helping students everywhere keep textbook fees down.

As he has mentored more than 100 undergraduates in his research lab, it is evident that Dr. Werner's teaching has a lasting effect on students. He offers research opportunities in his lab to all students in his courses, even though he teaches some of the largest courses in the biological sciences department. He also encourages students to serve as lab managers, which gives them leadership experience they can bring with them into the post-graduation realm. Dr. Werner continuously puts the needs of his students first and works with them individually to help them accomplish their goals whilst at Michigan Tech.

"Dr. Werner is a passionate teacher and at the same time he is compassionate toward his students. This unique combination makes him a sought-after instructor among our student body. He is very knowledgeable in his field of specialization and immensely enthusiastic. His lectures are always well prepared and are given in a manner that is easy to follow and comprehensible. He genuinely cares about how well students understand the material, which is made clear by the sheer amount of time he spends preparing his classes," said Jacqueline Huntoon, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs at Michigan Technological University.

The other nominees for the Distinguished Professor of the Year award were: Cheryl Geisthardt, Central Michigan University; Lori Faulkner, Ferris State University; Erica Hamilton, Grand Valley State University; H. Russell Searight, Lake Superior State University; Alyssa Hadley Dunn, Michigan State University; Lesley Larkin, Northern Michigan University; Anna Spagnuolo, Oakland University; Angela Violi, University of Michigan; Stephanie Roach, University of Michigan – Flint; and Jonathan Bush, Western Michigan University.

Tami Sivy, Professor of Chemistry, Saginaw Valley State University

Dr. Tami Sivy is Professor of chemistry at Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU) and has been the department chair for the past six years. She earned her B.S. in biochemistry from Calvin College and her Ph.D. in chemistry and biochemistry from the University of Colorado, Boulder. Since joining the SVSU faculty in 2008, Dr. Sivy has been at the forefront of cultivating exceptional undergraduate student experiences through research and community partnerships.

Dr. Sivy's teaching philosophy is centered around not only honing students' critical thinking skills but in helping them realize their education and knowledge can lead to delight in learning the material.

Her philosophy is appreciated and recognized by her students and colleagues. She has won multiple awards during her tenure at SVSU including the Franc A. Landee Award for Teaching Excellence, the most prestigious teaching award available at the university. Dr. Sivy also was an exchange professor at Shikoku University in Tokushima, Japan, where she served as an ambassador of SVSU to the community and taught undergraduate courses.

Through her goal of empowering students and encouraging them to take control of their learning, Dr. Sivy has mentored more than 50 students at SVSU in laboratory research. She teaches classes at every level, including introductory and general education chemistry courses, and is responsible for the entire upper-level biochemistry curriculum.

Dr. Sivy is a steering committee member of the Saginaw Bay Environmental Science Institute at SVSU. She contributed to development of a mobile lab and its curriculum that has been used for outreach for area students, and she has mentored many regional high school teachers and students in environmental research projects. She and her undergraduate students have been at the forefront for rapid DNA testing for detection of fecal contamination and its sources at beaches and rivers.

Because of Dr. Sivy's previous experience with freshwater testing, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy asked her to assist it in adapting testing for the COVID-19 virus in wastewater. She was the first in the state to rely on a team of undergraduate students for this testing, and since then they have worked tirelessly to detect COVID-19 in local communities, including on SVSU's campus and in 7 surrounding counties.

"As a faculty member at SVSU, Dr. Sivy positively impacts the classroom and surrounding community through her research on water quality. She is a teacher who mentors and understands the needs of students. Her dedication to the success of students and her commitment to her community, colleagues and SVSU are well evident," said Deborah R. Huntley, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Saginaw Valley State University.

Yunus Zeytuncu, Associate Professor of Mathematics, University of Michigan-Dearborn

Dr. Yunus Zeytuncu is Associate Professor of mathematics at University of Michigan-Dearborn, as well as Director of the Center for Mathematics Education. He earned his B.S. in mathematics from Bilkent University in Turkey, and his Ph.D. in mathematics from The Ohio State University. He has mentored 40 undergraduate students over the past seven years at the institution. He teaches five to six courses on campus each year while also running math enrichment activities for more than 150 students from the Metro Detroit area.

Dr. Zeytuncu strives to create an inspiring atmosphere in his classroom. In 2019, he received the Mathematical Association of America Michigan Section's Distinguished Teaching Award. Dr. Zeytuncu is revered as an extraordinary and engaging teacher, which is apparent in his student evaluations and colleague observations.

His unwavering commitment to mathematics outreach in the community has inspired the next generation of mathematics scholars. Dr. Zeytuncu established *The Maize and Blue Math Circle* and talked about the program during a um3detroit [Lightning Talk: Math Circles in Detroit](#). The Math Circle is an after-school program that trains UM-Dearborn students to teach math games to middle and

high school students that help improve not only their math skills, but their reasoning and critical thinking skills as well.

Dr. Zeytuncu advocates for an active approach to learning, which requires faculty to take interest in helping students both in and outside of the classroom. He holds a leadership position in the Research Experience for Undergraduates program which gives students various opportunities to complete project-based learning work. Dr. Zeytuncu speaks on the benefits of the program at conferences and has in turn encouraged colleagues at other schools to take on the approach. He is also an integral leader in the Dearborn Summer Undergraduate Research Experience Program.

“Professor Zeytuncu is a tireless and innovative educator who has dedicated much of his career to creating transformative opportunities for undergraduate students at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, as well as the broader southeast Michigan community of all ages,” said Susan E. Alcock, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at University of Michigan-Dearborn.

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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.