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## **Michigan Distinguished Professors of the Year Announced**

Lansing, MI – Three professors from among Michigan's 15 public universities who are leaders in their field and passionately dedicated to student success have been selected as Distinguished Professor of the Year Award recipients. The award will be presented by the Academic Affairs Officers of the Michigan Association of State Universities at the 2024 Distinguished Professor of the Year Awards program at the Lansing Center on Friday, April 12.

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 2024 recipients are: Dr. Shay Dawson of Central Michigan University, Dr. Charles (Chuck) Wallace of Michigan Technological University and Dr. Brad Wallar of Grand Valley State University.

"All three of this year's award recipients are emblematic of the commitment to excellence in undergraduate education that makes them stand out from their peers," said MASU Chief Executive Officer Daniel Hurley. "They each serve to illustrate that Michigan's 15 public universities are leading the way in providing exceptional educational opportunities for students throughout the state."

The 2024 recipients are introduced below:

### **Shay Dawson, Associate Professor of Recreational Therapy and Rehabilitation, Central Michigan University**

Dr. Dawson joined the CMU faculty in 2018. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in therapeutic recreation, both from Kent State University, and earned his doctorate in leisure behavior as well as social science approaches to health and healing systems from the School of Public Health at Indiana University.

As the director of CMU's undergraduate Recreational Therapy and Rehabilitation program, Dr. Dawson not only imparts theoretical foundations but also fosters engaging applications, preparing students to make meaningful contributions to their communities. He consistently embodies excellence across all award criteria, serving as a stellar example of superior teaching, scholarly achievement, innovation, and impactful contributions to both his institution and the broader community.

Dr. Dawson's influence extends beyond the classroom, where he builds strong mentoring relationships with students pursuing their studies and places great value on building community partnerships and relationships that support the success of his students. He actively collaborates with recreational therapists in the local and broader community, establishing partnerships that allow students to apply their knowledge in real world settings. He is currently embarking on a new partnership with the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe and local K-12 schools, where he will bring together undergraduate students to

provide therapeutic programming over a four-year period. Despite maintaining high expectations for student success, Dr. Dawson consistently receives exceptional evaluations that surpass department, college, and university standards.

His dedication to individualized and experiential learning is evident in the development of the undergraduate minor and graduate certificate in Disability Studies and Community Inclusion (DSCI). Dr. Dawson's commitment to raising awareness of disability issues is commendable, as seen in his creation of a study abroad program, growth of the DSCI minor beyond expectations, and securing a grant to provide disability training to healthcare and medical students.

Dr. Dawson's focus on equity and inclusion is reflected in his significant body of work. His research consistently addresses evidence-based practices to enhance the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. Notably, his publications, awards, and recognitions, including the 2023 Marcia Carter Scholarly Manuscript of the Year Award, highlight the impact of his contributions to recreational therapy and disability studies. His recent nomination for the University's Excellence in Teaching Award and receipt of the 2022 Exemplary Blackboard Course National Award for the creation and implementation of RPL 110: Experience of Disability and Social Marginalization, underscore his commitment to accessible education for all students.

**Charles (Chuck) Wallace, Associate Professor of Computer Science and Associate Dean of Curriculum and Instruction, Michigan Technological University**

Dr. Wallace has served on the MTU faculty since 2000. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania, an M.A. in linguistics from the University of California, and his doctorate in computer science and engineering from the University of Michigan.

Dr. Wallace's research is primarily in the areas of computing education, software usability and ethics. His work is nationally recognized and supported by external funding, including from the National Science Foundation. In addition to his extraordinary research, Dr. Wallace often puts his colleagues' research into practice. He views their research as an asset, not as competition. He helped design MTU's software engineering program and remains actively involved in student advising. Furthermore, collaborating with colleagues, he partnered with other researchers to make connections between computing and other disciplines, particularly in the social sciences and humanities.

Specifically, last year Dr. Wallace led a team that created a series of events called Robot101. Robot101 celebrated the 101st anniversary of the term "robot," which was coined in Čapek's play R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots). The activities included discussions of the play and its adaptations, which collectively represented a university-wide discussion of opportunities and threats around technology, automation, and AI. He also co-designed and co-taught a course titled Read Write Engage with colleagues in literature, philosophy, and history, re-envisioning first-year composition as a way of exploring meaningful issues surrounding technology.

Dr. Wallace has also made significant contributions to his local community. He developed and delivered programs for adults and children to help improve digital literacy, and recruited students to help teach and deliver these courses, allowing them to improve their technical and interpersonal skills while serving the community. His Building Adult Skills in Computing (BASIC) program pairs students with digitally marginalized residents of the local community, helping them build competence and confidence. In

Copper Country Coders, students design and lead classes in computer science and programming for middle and high school students in the community.

For his efforts in both the classroom and the community, Dr. Wallace has received additional national recognition, including presenting at a White House Conference on Aging, the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade, and the National Academy of Sciences.

### **Brad Wallar, Professor of Chemistry, Grand Valley State University**

Dr. Wallar has been a member of the GVSU faculty since 2003. He earned his bachelor's degree in biology at the University of Michigan-Flint and his doctorate in biochemistry at the University of Minnesota.

Dr. Wallar is a dedicated mentor, serving as a faculty mentor for 16 Honors College projects, five Goldwater Scholarship applicants, 11 Student Summer Scholars, two Modified Student Summer Scholars, a Beckman Scholar, three McNair Scholars and five RISE Scholars. He's committed to understanding each person's background, strengths, and growth areas, and is passionate about offering opportunities to students who might not have found their way into a research lab before. As a first-generation college graduate himself, he credits his own mentorship experience with faculty for finding a career he loves and hopes to instill the same confidence in his students as his professors did with him.

In his 21 years at GVSU, Dr. Wallar has taught 2,000 students, advised hundreds of undergraduate students, obtained multiple National Institute of Health and National Science Foundation grants, and developed a nationally recognized research laboratory with undergraduate students. He's received multiple awards including the TRIO Impact Award, the CLAS Lifetime Service Award, the Distinguished Undergraduate Mentoring Award, and the University Outstanding Teacher Award. Dr. Wallar has published 17 peer-reviewed articles with 20 undergraduate co-authors and has presented 28 posters at national and international meetings with 24 undergraduates, and 77 posters at regional and local conferences with 46 students.

Throughout his courses, Dr. Wallar uses real life examples to connect course content to cutting edge concepts from COVID, cancer and antibiotic resistance. His most valuable contribution to individual work in curriculum development is in the biochemistry lab. His class, CHM 462: Techniques in Biochemistry, is not a typical science lab course, as it's been designed to mimic a research lab more typically found in industry or graduate school, allowing students to perform important biochemistry techniques. Students have appreciated the immersive experience he's developed.

The other nominees for the Distinguished Professor of the Year Award were: Jodonnis Rodriguez, Eastern Michigan University; Joshua Pardon, Ferris State University; Robert Kipka, Lake Superior State University; Divya Victor, Michigan State University; Jessica Thompson, Northern Michigan University; Warren Fincher, Saginaw Valley State University; Pinderjeet Gill, University of Michigan; Amanda Esquivel, University of Michigan-Dearborn; C. Dennis Simpson, Western Michigan University, and Regina Zubick, Wayne State University.

A photo of each award recipient can be downloaded 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.