



**February 24, 2026**

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*Recognizing excellence in  
teaching, research, and service  
to the university and community*

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**MONTANA**  
STATE UNIVERSITY  
**BILLINGS**



# From the Chancellor & Provost

Dear Faculty and Guests,

Congratulations to all of the Faculty Excellence Award winners. Our faculty members pursue excellence and place student success at the center of their work. Through their dedication, they help sustain the culture of care at MSUB that sets us apart from other institutions.

Faculty challenge students to think critically while fostering an environment where students ask questions and engage in meaningful conversations. The mentorship our faculty provide to students influences not only their academic success, but also their personal growth.

Please join me in congratulating faculty on this well-deserved recognition.

With appreciation,

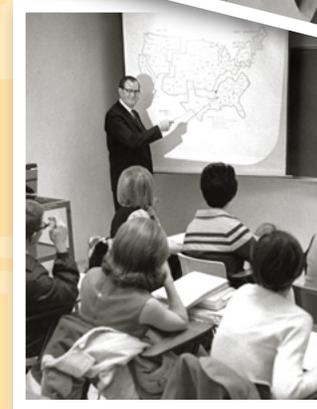
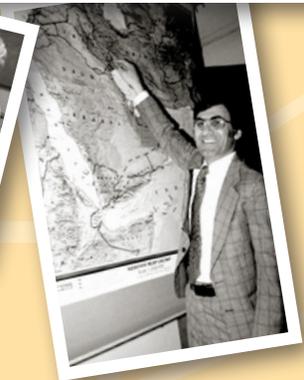


*Stefani Hicswa, Ph.D., Chancellor*



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## A LEGACY OF **EXCELLENCE**



For nearly a century, our faculty have been inspiring, challenging, encouraging, and preparing our students.

**THE TRADITION LIVES ON!**

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# An Evening of Recognition

Reception at **5:00pm**

Dinner served at **5:30pm**

Ceremony at **6:00pm**

## Masters of Ceremonies

**Lee Vartanian, Ph.D.**, Provost & Vice Chancellor for  
Academic Affairs

**Dan Carter**, Director of Communications and Marketing

## Welcome

**Stefani Hicswa, Ph.D.**, Chancellor

**Lee Vartanian, Ph.D.**, Provost & Vice Chancellor for  
Academic Affairs



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## Presentation of Awards

### *ASMSUB Outstanding Faculty Awards*

PRESENTED BY

**Elijah Sneigoski**

President, Associated Students of MSUB

### *Montana Center for Inclusive Education Support of Students with Disabilities Awards (3 awards)*

PRESENTED BY

**Amanda Stonerock**

Director, Montana Center for Inclusive Education

### *Early Achievement Research and Creative Accomplishments Award*

PRESENTED BY

**Kurt Toenjes, Ph.D.**

Dean, College of Health Professions and Science

### *Dr. Tasneem Khaleel Award for Mentoring Young Professional Women*

PRESENTED BY

**Joy Honea, Ph.D.**

Professor of Sociology, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences

### *Outstanding Service Learning Faculty Award*

PRESENTED BY

**Susan Gilbertz, Ph.D.**

Dean, College of Business

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***Excellence Award for Non-Tenured Faculty***

PRESENTED BY  
**Steve Eliason, Ph.D.**

Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences

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***City College Faculty Leadership Award***

PRESENTED BY  
**Vern Gagnon, M.Ed.**  
Dean, City College

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***Outstanding Career Achievement Research and Creative Accomplishments Award***

PRESENTED BY  
**Kurt Toenjes, Ph.D.**

Dean, College of Health Professions and Science

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***Faculty Excellence Award***

PRESENTED BY  
**Susan Gilbertz, Ph.D.**  
Dean, College of Business

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***Faculty Excellence Award***

PRESENTED BY  
**Kurt Toenjes, Ph.D.**

Dean, College of Health Professions and Science

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***Faculty Excellence Award***

PRESENTED BY  
**Jodi Lightner, M.F.A.**

Chair and Professor of Art, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences

***Winston & Helen Cox Fellowship Award***

PRESENTED BY  
**Kurt Toenjes, Ph.D.**

Dean, College of Health Professions and Science

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***Walter & Charlotte Pippenger Excellence in Innovation Award***

PRESENTED BY  
**Stefani Hicswa, Ph.D.**  
Chancellor

AND

**Lee Vartanian, Ph.D.**

Provost & Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

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***Achieving Tenure, Emeriti, Years of Service, and Retiree***

PRESENTED BY  
**Lee Vartanian, Ph.D.**

Provost & Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

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**Closing Remarks**

Stefani Hicswa, Ph.D., Chancellor



## ASMSUB Outstanding Faculty Awards

The ASMSUB Outstanding Faculty Member Award honors faculty from each of the colleges who demonstrate exceptional commitment to student learning, well-being, and success. Selected by students, these instructors create welcoming and inclusive classrooms, encourage students to do their best, and make learning engaging and meaningful.

Recipients are known for teaching with passion, showing flexibility and understanding, getting to know students as individuals, and fostering an environment where students feel safe, supported, and valued. They consistently go above and beyond, making a lasting difference in the academic experience at MSU Billings.

This award reflects the voice of MSUB students and highlights the collective impact of outstanding faculty across campus.

### Curtis Leibrand

Instructor, Nursing, Health and Public Safety, City College

### Anna Talafuse, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Business Administration, College of Business

### Jason Comer, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Biological and Physical Sciences, College of Health Professions and Science

### John J. Roberts

Department Chair & Professor, Music, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences

### Daniel Charlton

Assistant Professor, Educational Theory and Practice, College of Education

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## Montana Center for Inclusive Education Support of Students with Disabilities Awards

### Ms. Aundrea Gee

Assistant Professor, Rehabilitation and Human Services, College of Health Professions and Sciences



Aundrea Gee's conversations with students about various aspects of rehabilitation processes are sometimes based on personal experience.

Not only did she provide rehab services at St. Vincent Healthcare for a number of years, she has experience as a patient.

Ms. Gee was working on earning advanced degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling and Counseling Education and Supervision at Kent State University in 2018 when she was hit in the head by a baseball at the Akron Rubber Ducks season opener. That event took her away from school and work for a year and launched a path to recovery that involved a variety of rehabilitation services.

While overcoming physical and cognitive challenges is only part of her story, the experience helps her relate to students when they learn about the rehabilitation services. Additionally, Ms. Gee said, the path led the Ohio native with deep Montana roots back to Billings where she can pursue her love of teaching. She started as an adjunct in Fall 2023 and became an assistant professor a year ago.

"This is my dream come true," she said. "I've always loved academia."

Nominators at the Montana Center for Inclusive Education said her students can sense her passion.

"Her students consistently highlight her thoughtful listening, flexibility, and genuine care when they navigate challenges related to their disabilities," the MCIE nominator wrote. "Whether adapting coursework, offering encouragement, or problem-solving alongside students, Aundrea creates an environment where every student feels heard, respected, and empowered to succeed. Her advocacy and compassion make her an invaluable champion for inclusive education."

For her part, Ms. Gee said the feelings are mutual.

"The best part about teaching here is the students," she said. "I am impressed by their dedication, their desire to learn and their passion to help others."

This award runs concurrently with another honor for Ms. Gee. This February she will be recognized by the Association for Rehabilitation, Research, Policy and Education as 2025 Educator of the Year.

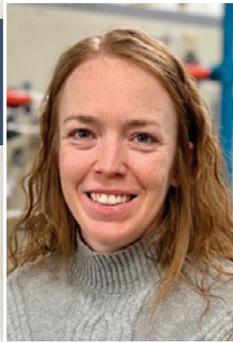
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## Montana Center for Inclusive Education Support of Students with Disabilities Awards

### Heather Slezak

Instructor, Instrument and Electrical,  
City College



Heather Slezak tackles education challenges much the same way she handled problems working oilfields as a civil engineer: One step at a time.

Helping students with specific needs, coordinating lessons with a lab at City College, or building an assessment plan is all about engineering a solution, she says.

“Teaching and assessment are all viewed as an engineering problem to me,” she said. “I always believe I can build a better curriculum and build a better test. I didn’t realize I looked at it that way until a student mentioned it to me.”

Ms. Slezak earned her civil engineering degree at Georgia Tech and went to work supervising hydraulic fracturing in New York, Texas, and North Dakota. She and her family eventually moved to Billings. She started work as the Instrument and Electrical Technician instructor in 2022. Her work there has drawn attention from students to colleagues.

The Montana Center for Inclusive Education said she is “known for her attentive listening, timely communication, and unwavering commitment to student success. She approaches instruction with flexibility and creativity, presenting information through multiple methods to ensure every learner has the opportunity to understand and thrive.”

Ms. Slezak, however, views the accolades with humility.

“It’s just me helping students,” she said.

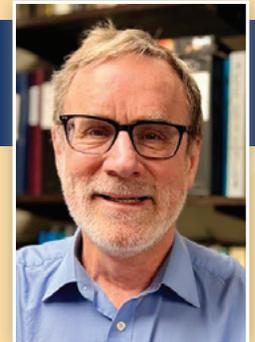
Beyond the classroom, she teaches residential electricity courses for women, building confidence and broadening access to others. A strong advocate of STEM education, she also works on drone camps with MSU Billings colleagues.

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## Montana Center for Inclusive Education Support of Students with Disabilities Awards

### Dr. Mark Jacobson

Department Chair and Professor of Mathematics,  
College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences



When Dr. Mark Jacobson graduated from high school in Billings, he wanted to work with math at a level that involved more than working problems and taking tests. So, he chose an electrical engineering path.

“I chose that because it was the most difficult mathematically,” he said.

What he found, through advancing his studies and finding even more interesting challenges, that math could be used to do things beyond engineering. He did some work with renowned physicist Dr. David C. Hogg and “wanted to carry that experience forward in teaching and learning.”

Dr. Jacobson’s passion led to research on understanding electromagnetic wave propagation in using GPS signals to measure snow depth, a process that no one in the world had done before. His paper on that topic was published in 2008, and his theories are still being used.

Fast forward today and Dr. Jacobson’s passion is still evident.

The MCIE staff said Dr. Jacobson shows exceptional dedication to supporting students with disabilities by being a thoughtful listener and passionate

educator. He continues to “bring math to life by helping students connect mathematics and statistics to real-world applications — an interest he highlights on his faculty page and models in his teaching every day,” his nominators wrote.

Students with disabilities consistently note that Dr. Jacobson takes their accommodations seriously, ensuring that testing needs are met with adequate time, appropriate materials, and a respectful learning environment.

“His commitment to equity, understanding, and student success embodies the spirit of this award,” they said.

As a longtime faculty member and department chair for 11 years, Dr. Jacobson enjoys conveying the love of learning to all students.

“Learn what you can,” he said, “because you never know where it will take you.”

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## Early Achievement Research and Creative Accomplishments Award

### Dr. Madison Collins

Assistant Professor of Microbiology, College of Health Professions and Science



Dr. Madison Collins does big things by studying very small things. The kind of small things where “going viral” has real consequences.

And because of all that, her students get a better education.

Employing a combination of scientific talent, boundless creative energy, and genuine care for her students, Dr. Collins has made an impact on MSU Billings in just four years. She has been able to advance knowledge in her field, secure significant external support, publish in top journals, and build a lab culture that transforms student trajectories, according to her nominators for this award. In every respect, they say, she embodies the qualities this award is designed to recognize.

Dr. Collins fell in love with microbiology research in 2013 when she was an undergraduate at Montana State University in Bozeman and worked on several honeybee host-pathogen research projects. She later worked as a PhD graduate research assistant studying *Staphylococcus aureus*. Dr. Collins did

her post-doctorate work for the National Institutes of Health at the Rocky Mountain Labs in Hamilton, where she later became lab manager.

Her cutting-edge research involves understanding the microscopic regulatory relationship between *Staphylococcus aureus* (the bacteria that causes staph infections) and how it interacts with human immune cells central to fighting bacteria infections. Dr. Collins’ work has led to securing more than \$340,000 in competitive external funding for the university. And, as her nominators say, she actively mentors undergraduate researchers, with several students presenting at the 2025 INBRE Western Regional Conference.

“Her efforts not only advance scientific understanding but also provide transformative experiences for her students,” the nominators said.

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## Dr. Tasneem Khaleel Award for Mentoring Young Professional Women

### Dr. Rachael De La Cruz

Assistant Professor of History, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences



Dr. Rachael De La Cruz is all about building community. All you need to do is step into the Women’s and Gender Studies Center and you can see it.

Opposite a life-size cardboard cutout of former Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg are signs that affirm life choices, elevate marginalized groups and support mental health. Her friendly demeanor is as warm as the 100 square-foot space many students call a home away from home at MSU Billings.

“It’s really important to me for women and LGBTQ students to have a safe place to be,” she says.

That mindset led to her nomination as mentor for young professional women.

“When she took over the Center’s leadership, she not only continued the programming and services that were offered, but expanded them,” her nominator wrote. “There are regular events for students and faculty, advising sessions every semester, film screening and other activities open to the public, and community

engagement activities such as tabling events. She has created a welcoming and supporting space for the whole campus community.”

Students can often be seen making the trek to the Department of History where they seek guidance and a safe space to discuss issues that impact them.

In addition, Dr. De La Cruz serves on the Hispanic Outreach/La Plaza committee and has served on the DEI Council. She also represents the interests of women at the national level, in her role as the institutional representative to the National Women’s Studies Association.

“Her service work, her impressive teaching, and her impressive scholarship record make her an excellent choice for this award for mentoring young women professionals,” her nominator wrote.

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## Excellence Award for Non-Tenured Faculty

### Dr. Wendy Felese

Assistant Professor of American Indian and Indigenous Studies, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences



When Dr. Wendy Felese arrived at MSU Billings in 2023, it didn't take her long to get to work. American Indian and Indigenous Studies is a large area, but she was undaunted in her quest to make her curriculum as valuable to students as possible.

She started working on new articulation agreements with tribal colleges, leaned into support efforts by the Native American Achievement Center with outreach, and started enhancing the program.

"This is her third year on faculty, and I am incredibly impressed by her work in the short time that she has been at MSUB," a nominator for her award wrote. "As the sole faculty member in the AIIS program, Dr. Felese has been responsible for designing curriculum, conducting program assessment, and staffing courses. She works closely with the Native American Achievement Center and regularly travels around the state to meet with tribal representatives and leaders of Montana's tribal colleges."

Viewed by students as approachable and caring, Dr. Felese worked as faculty advisor to the Native American Advisory Council in 2024 and is currently the faculty advisor for the student swing dance club.

In addition, she has robust research and presentation agendas. This month, Dr. Felese will be on a panel discussion in Philadelphia on "A Vision for Liberating Our Democracy: Examining the Religious and Racialized Roots of American Democracy." Her topic, she said, focuses on how the Haudenosaunee Confederacy has had a long-lasting impact on American democracy.

"The foundation of our democracy has always been Indigenous," she said.

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## Outstanding Service Learning Faculty Award

### Jessie Perius, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Management, College of Business



Learning takes on many forms and with Dr. Jessie Perius at the helm, that learning is immersive, active, and applicable to real-world business.

In Spring 2024, Dr. Perius introduced a course now titled BMGT 494 - International Business: Portugal. The course was intended to be a pilot course that fulfilled the international business requirement for MSU Billings management students but included a creative component: travel to Portugal for collaborative learning with Portuguese students. Working with the Office of International Studies at MSU Billings and College of Business colleagues, Dr. Perius hammered out details on getting MSUB students to Portugal and Portuguese students to MSUB.

The course contained an important service-learning component which partnered with businesses in the state of Montana and manufacturers in Portugal to provide one-of-a-kind experiences for students to present a business plan for international expansion for the Portugal manufacturer. Students visited the manufacturing location, conducted research in the Montana market, and

after both student groups from MSUB and IPSGAYA University visited the other's campuses. The goal was to have students present their business plan for international expansion to the manufacturer.

The nominator for her award noted that Dr. Perius' impact on students and the College of Business was profound.

"This very unique project has developed a solid partnership between the two universities, has strengthened international exposure for students, has provided research opportunities for students and faculty involved."

The project continues with high interest from students. And thanks to Dr. Perius' involvement, a complex international project has been transformed into a high-impact learning experience recognized by faculty, students and community members.

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## City College Leadership Award

### Katherine Pfau

Department Chair, Transportation & Industry;  
Instructor, Automotive Technology, City College



Kat Pfau is all about tools.

When she is teaching her automotive technology classes, she makes sure students are using the right wrenches, sockets, or test lights to properly learn. When she is working with other members of her department, she makes sure they have the right kinds of tools for curriculum development and assessment.

Running through it all, like lubricant in a well-maintained engine, is a willingness to make sure everyone has the academic and supportive tools they need to succeed.

Ms. Pfau's tenure at City College started in 2003, when the two-year arm of MSU Billings was evolving into a comprehensive community college. Fixing cars and trucks was second nature to the Billings-area native. She just wanted others to be in the same field.

Since that time, scores of graduates have entered the work world. And, just as notable, she and colleagues have developed a free "Women Supporting Women" program that raises confidence of Billings-area women for automotive maintenance basics, home

electrical basics, and welding.

"We just start from the basics and go from there,"

Ms. Pfau said. "The more that there's an awareness, the more you don't have to be scared to try it."

Her nominators note Ms. Pfau's willingness to go the extra mile for all students.

"She often walks them directly to support services in the Tech Building, such as TRIO SSS, the Academic Support Center, and Jacket Student Central," her nominator wrote. "Her hands-on approach — meeting students where they are and helping them navigate challenges — demonstrates her dedication to their success."

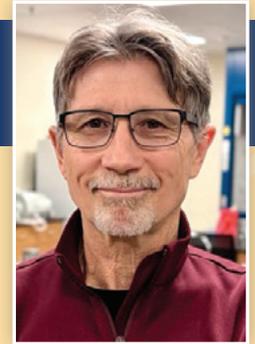
Leading by example, City College colleagues have adopted the same culture of support, which has had a noticeable, positive impact across the two-year campus.

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## Outstanding Career Achievement Research and Creative Accomplishments Award

### David Butler, Ph.D.

Professor of Molecular Biology and Genetics, College of Health Professions and Science



If MSU Billings were to create a pre-professional program for future med school or med research applicants, Dr. David Butler would be its spokesmodel.

Now in his 30th year of teaching and doing research at MSU Billings, Dr. Butler has mentored more than 60 undergraduate students who have received invaluable research experience in his laboratory.

"Many of these have proceeded to earn doctorates from prestigious programs such as the University of Texas, University of Iowa, and University of Wisconsin," a nominator wrote. "In addition, many of his undergraduate researchers have been accepted into medical schools around the country due in part to the research experience provided by David."

For several years, Dr. Butler has served in the role of primary academic advisor for the MSU Billings Medical Laboratory Science program. Part of that role is helping students prepare for and obtain their clinical training placements. And for the past five years, he has been the Director of the Clinical Testing Lab at Student Health

Services. The lab was started to do surveillance testing of athletes for COVID during the pandemic.

Since then, the lab has transitioned to offering PCR-based COVID and FluA/B testing for any student. In that role, the lab tests about 100 students per year.

Over the course of his career, Dr. Butler has focused on antifungal small molecule work that has resulted in multiple publications and three awarded patents. Current research is using a yeast model system to better understand protein mutations related to ALS.

The connection to students and seeing their success remains a highlight, he said.

"I love teaching," he said. "I get a lot of short-term positive feedback from students who like the hands-on experience. That's really meaningful to a lot of them."

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## Faculty Excellence Award

### Dr. Anna Talafuse

Associate Professor of Marketing, College of Business



You wouldn't know it at first glance, but Dr. Anna Talafuse knows a lot about the annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. The leather chaps and Harley Davidson bikes are one thing, but more knowledge about consumer behavior and demographics of rally attendees is another. These insights can inform marketing strategies designed to grow rally attendance by tapping into the decision-making and social sharing that fuel the event's success.

Making marketing research relevant to students is a hallmark of Dr. Talafuse's work. She is known as a successful researcher with publications in journals and conference proceedings strengthening the College of Business's research profile and academic reputation.

Whether it is wearing a shirt at Sturgis that says "ask me about my research" or diving into data, Dr. Talafuse is committed to classroom integration of her research and integration of experiential learning projects, elevating the teaching-learning experience. Her presentations are known for their intellectual depth, creativity, and engaging delivery.

Her works have included topics such as sustainability efforts marketed by CVS Caremark, Target, and Walmart; a longitudinal study exploring sales call anxiety; and an exploration of Cracker Barrel's recent re-branding fiasco.

She also takes part in College of Business research projects and is the faculty advisor for the American Marketing Association chapter on campus.

"Her ability to balance a rigorous research agenda with her teaching and mentorship responsibilities serves as an inspiration to colleagues and students alike," her award nominator wrote.

Dr. Talafuse started teaching at MSU Billings 16 years ago, and said she enjoys making sure her knowledge and research is applied to real-world challenges.

"I absolutely love our students," she said. "A lot of our students do fantastic things."

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## Faculty Excellence Award

### Suzette Nynas, Ed.D., LAT, ATC

Professor, Associate Department Chair and Program Director, Athletic Training, College of Health Professions and Science



When Dr. Suzette Nynas' students tell someone "we've got your back," they mean it in a literal sense. Same goes for their head. And their neck. And their wrists, knees, elbows and ankles.

That's because when it comes to holistic healthcare that covers everything from preventative care to education and nutrition, athletic training is unique. And Dr. Nynas understands what it means more than most.

Aside from her experience as head athletic trainer at Rocky Mountain College before joining MSU Billings in 2007, she now serves as director of the Athletic Training master's program. She is responsible for all accreditation-related duties, including ensuring standards are met and that required reports are complete and submitted. She regularly teaches overload so that students have necessary course offerings. And, until recently, she was also the department chair for Health and Human Performance.

For Dr. Nynas, the work means a better student experience.

"The best part of my job is the students," she said. "They have a real eagerness to learn."

Dr. Nynas holds one of the most important faculty leadership roles on campus; chair of the Academic Senate. In that role, Dr. Nynas works closely with MSUB leadership, and manages all university curriculum-related matters. She oversees administrator evaluations, ensures that course and program proposals are robust and viable, serves on Cabinet, Jacket Leadership Team, and the Budget Advisory Council.

"She has a calm demeanor, takes concerns seriously, and always follows through," her award nominator wrote. "She expertly leads the Academic Senate, considers all perspectives, and makes decisions thoughtfully.... MSUB benefits immensely from having her on faculty, and in a leadership role."

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## Faculty Excellence Award

### Keeara Rhoades, MFA

Associate Professor of New Media and Photography,  
College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences



Ms. Keeara Rhoades' life has included a camera since she was 8 years old. The tool used to catalog landscapes and foster creative exploration is always nearby.

"I had a Kodak disc camera, and I would take pictures of pets, siblings and friends," she said. "It took off from there."

The hobby turned into a passion and that passion led to art. Her work explores liminal spaces within perception, transformation, and the slippages between memory, labor, and time. Growing up in Wyoming, surrounded by vast landscapes and deep histories of extraction, industry, and erasure, Ms. Rhoades developed an early fascination with the remnants of time and memory.

She now shares that passion with students, as she "gives an above and beyond gift of time and talent to the students, department, and university," a nominator wrote.

She said she likes to have a lot of contact time with students – whether in the classroom or the studio – so they can explore and create art.

"I love getting to know my students," she said. "I love the challenge of getting them to be able to critically think so they can find their voice."

Her work as an educator goes beyond teaching and creating art. As the sole new media professor, Ms. Rhoades takes on the responsibility to make sure that all 20 machines in the Mac lab have updated software and operating systems and students have access to functional digital and film cameras, video cameras, programmable lighting kits, printers, dark room enlargers, timers, and fresh chemistry.

"In addition to maintaining guru status in the digital art world, Keeara, shares her photography expertise with the department by documenting the Northcutt Steele Gallery Exhibitions for publication," a nominator wrote.

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## Winston & Helen Cox Fellowship Award

### Dr. Madison Collins

Assistant Professor of Microbiology, College of  
Health Professions and Science



Dr. Madison Collins knows her way around a lab. She's been doing it for a dozen years and is just hitting her stride.

Born and raised in the Billings/Laurel area, Dr. Collins started her higher education journey at MSU Billings and traveled west as her path led studies in immunology and infectious diseases. She is now a full-fledged infectious disease immunological scientist who brought her passion of teaching back to her home community.

The nominator for this award noted that while at MSU Billings for only a short time, Dr. Collins has "distinguished herself through exceptional teaching, innovative scholarship, and dedicated service — hallmarks of a truly outstanding faculty member. Dr. Collins is a gifted educator whose classroom energy and clarity have made her one of the most respected instructors in the department."

While maintaining her research work, she has taught a wide range of courses, including Medical Microbiology, Microbiology for Health Sciences, General Microbiology and Lab, and Discover Biology online. She consistently earns exemplary evaluations and heartfelt student praise. Her students describe her as inclusive, organized, and deeply invested in their success.

A first-generation graduate, Dr. Collins

has the innate ability to mentor MSU Billings students, helping them see themselves as capable scientists.

Her undergraduate research lab regularly supports six to seven students at a time, each conducting an independent project. It supports one of the unique aspects of MSU Billings: undergraduates not only learn, they do.

"Dr. Collins's true hallmark is that her research is a teaching enterprise — one where students learn the process of discovery," the nominator wrote.

**The Winston and Helen Cox Fellowship** is named in honor of **Dick Cox's** parents and is generously supported by **Richard and Cheri Cox**, their sons **Shaun and Scott**, and their families. This named fellowship recognizes **junior faculty who show exceptional promise as teachers, scholars, and institutional leaders** in the **College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences** or the **College of Health Professions and Science**, reflecting the Cox family's long-standing commitment to strengthening **teaching, scholarship, and faculty excellence at Montana State University Billings.**

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## Walter & Charlotte Pippenger Excellence in Innovation Award

### Recipients Revealed During the Awards Ceremony

The **Walter and Charlotte Pippenger Excellence in Innovation Award** was established in **2005** at **Montana State University Billings** by **Richard and Cheri Cox**, their sons **Shaun and Scott**, and their families, in honor of **Cheri's parents**. This distinguished award celebrates an individual or group whose work reflects exceptional **creativity** and **innovation** in enhancing the undergraduate **teaching and learning experience**.

The Pippenger Award reflects the Cox family's long-standing support of faculty excellence at MSU Billings. Dick and Cheri have also funded the **Winston and Helen Cox Fellowship**, named in honor of **Dick's parents**. This named fellowship recognizes **junior faculty who show exceptional promise as teachers, scholars, and institutional leaders** in the **College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences** or the **College of Health Professions and Science** and reflects the family's commitment to strengthening teaching and learning. **Shaun and Scott** share this commitment and continue to champion **innovation, creativity, and student-centered learning** at Montana State University Billings.

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## Years of Service

### 5 Years

**Dr. Melinda Aley**

Assistant Professor, Communication, CLASS

**Melissa Elizabeth Bergerson**

Assistant Professor & Program Director, Nursing, Health and Public Safety, CC

**Rodrigo Cortopassi Goron Lobo, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor, Business Administration, COB

**Dr. Katie Curry**

Instructor, Nursing, Health and Public Safety, CC

**Dr. Hope Dewell Gentry**

Assistant Professor, Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, CLASS

**Robin Earles**

Assistant Professor, Art, CLASS

**Dr. Jay Gentry**

Assistant Professor, English, Philosophy and Modern Languages, CLASS

**Scott Gorman**

University Lecturer, Business Administration, COB

**Marty Holin, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor, Rehabilitation and Human Services, CHPS

**Kameron Nelson, Psy.D.**

Assistant Professor, Psychology, CLASS

**Dr. Daren Small**

Assistant Professor, Music, CLASS

**Andrew E. Stene**

Instructor, Transportation and Welding, CC

**Dr. Elaine Westbrook**

Assistant Professor, Educational Theory and Practice, COE

### 10 Years

**Austin Grant Bennett**

Associate Professor, General Education, CC

**Jenna Jones, MHA, RT(R), (ARRT)**

Assistant Professor & Program Director, Nursing, Health and Public Safety, CC

**Dr. Ambrin Masood**

Professor, Rehabilitation and Human Services, CHPS

### 15 Years

**Dr. Rachael Waller**

Professor & Department Chair, Educational Theory and Practice, COE

**Lynne Fitzgerald**

Professor, Health Sciences and Human Performance, CHPS

*continued*

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**Dr. Jennifer Lynn**  
Professor, History, CLASS

**Patricia Nichols, MS, LCPC**  
Senior Lecturer, Rehabilitation and  
Human Services, CHPS

**Randy Roberts**  
Instructor, Transportation and  
Welding, CC

## 20 Years

**Chairsty E. Stewart**  
Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, CLASS

## 25 Years

**Andrea Payne Garza**  
Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, CLASS

## 30 Years

**David Butler, Ph.D.**  
Professor, Biological and Physical  
Sciences, CHPS

## Tenure

**Jason Comer, Ph.D.**  
Associate Professor, Biological and  
Physical Sciences, CHPS

**Marty Holin, Ph.D.**  
Associate Professor, Rehabilitation  
and Human Services, CHPS

**Dr. Daniel Willems**  
Associate Professor, Biological and  
Physical Sciences, CHPS

## Emeriti

**Dr. Susan P. Gregory**  
Professor, Educational Theory and  
Practice, COE

**Dr. Michael D. Havens**  
Professor, Psychology, CLASS

**Matthew N. McMullen, Ph.D.**  
Professor, Psychology, CLASS

**Dr. Bernard Quetchenbach**  
Professor, English, Philosophy &  
Modern Languages, CLASS

## Retirees

**Anne Cole**  
Instructor, General Education, CC

**Dr. Susan P. Gregory**  
Professor, Educational Theory and  
Practice, COE

**Dr. Michael D. Havens**  
Professor, Psychology, CLASS

**Matthew N. McMullen, Ph.D.**  
Professor, Psychology, CLASS

**Michele McMullen, MS, MA, RDN,  
LN**  
University Lecturer, Biological and  
Physical Sciences, CHPS

**Cindy Millard**  
Instructor, Computer Technology, CC

**Robin Rasmussen, M.S.**  
Instructor, Nursing, Health & Public  
Safety, CC

**Dr. Bernard Quetchenbach**  
Professor, English, Philosophy &  
Modern Languages, CLASS

## Thank you to Nominators

Thank you to the many individuals who submitted nominations for this year's Faculty Excellence Awards. Your commitment to recognizing the accomplishments of your colleagues strengthens our campus community and highlights the excellence we value at MSU Billings.

## Special Thanks to everyone who made this evening possible

Andrea Aebersold, Ph.D.

Sierra Dolezal

Dan Carter

Patrick Williams

Morgan Fradenburgh

Rita Rabe-Meduna

Cara Virostko

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