



2026  
Academic Achievement  
Awards Ceremony



*April 29  
Foundation Building  
Blasco Event Wing*

**UNLV**



## WELCOME!

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Each spring, we take great pleasure in celebrating the accomplishments of our top-performing students, faculty, and staff. It's a time to recognize the commitment to excellence that is propelling UNLV along its Top Tier path. With more than 50 awards being presented today, it's easy to see the abundance of talent we have on our campus.

This afternoon, we'll highlight achievements that span all areas of academia. Our honorees have garnered recognition as scholars, teachers, academic advisors, leaders, and innovators. Representing our unique diversity, they come from colleges, schools, and units across the university and from both the undergraduate and graduate student bodies. They have been awarded these recognitions by our NSHE Board of Regents, university committees, and students.

To our honorees, your successes have set a high bar for others to follow, and you should be proud of the work you've done. Your passion, dedication, and Rebel spirit have enriched our university in countless ways, and each of you has played an important role in our progress towards achieving our Top Tier goals and providing a world-class education.

Today we join all of our university colleagues in expressing our deep appreciation and congratulations to those outstanding individuals being recognized. It's an honor to celebrate with you.

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The University of Nevada, Las Vegas wishes to acknowledge and honor the Indigenous communities of this region, and recognize that the university is situated on the traditional homelands of the Nuwuvi, Southern Paiute People.

We offer gratitude for the land itself, for those who have stewarded it for generations, and for the opportunity to study, learn, work, and be in community with this land. We encourage everyone in this space to engage in continued learning about the Indigenous peoples who work and live on this land since time immemorial, including the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe and the Moapa Band of Paiutes, and about the historical and present realities of colonialism.

As one of the most diverse universities in the United States, UNLV believes it is important to recognize and appreciate the use of Southern Paiute land as part of its mission to be a welcoming and inclusive place for working and learning.



<https://www.unlv.edu/about/statements-compliance/land-acknowledgement>

# CONTENTS

---

Welcome!.....	3
Land Acknowledgement.....	4
<b>REGENTS' AWARDS</b>	
Regents' Student Awards .....	6
Regents' Faculty Awards .....	6
<b>UNIVERSITY AWARDS</b>	
Rebel Career Champion Network Award .....	7
University Libraries Award.....	7
Research Awards .....	7
Teaching Awards .....	8
Academic Faculty Awards.....	8
Lifelong Learning Award.....	8
Mission Fulfillment, Assessment, and Accreditation Awards.....	9
Community Engagement Awards .....	9
Graduate College Awards.....	10
Academic Advising Awards .....	11
Administrative Faculty Awards .....	11
<b>IN MEMORIAM</b> .....	14
<b>UNIT AWARDS</b>	
Academic Advising .....	16
Lee Business School .....	16
School of Dental Medicine .....	16
Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering .....	17
Honors College .....	17
William F. Harrah College of Hospitality.....	17
School of Integrated Health Sciences .....	18
College of Liberal Arts .....	18
University Libraries .....	19
Lifelong Learning .....	19
School of Nursing .....	20
School of Public Health.....	20
College of Sciences .....	21
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs.....	21

# REGENTS' AWARDS

## REGENTS' STUDENT AWARDS

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Sam Lieberman Regents' Award for Student Scholarship  
(Undergraduate)

**Yan Arnaiz**, *Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry*

Sam Lieberman Regents' Award for Student Scholarship  
(Graduate)

**Richard Chang**, *Department of Psychology*

## REGENTS' FACULTY AWARDS

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Jason Geddes Rising Researcher Award

**Kara Christensen Pacella**, *Department of Psychology*

**Samantha John**, *Department of Brain Health*

**Shengjie Zhai**, *Department of Electrical and Computer  
Engineering*

Regents' Researcher Award (Mid-Career)

**Arya Udry**, *Department of Geoscience*

Regents' Creative Activities Award

**Javon Johnson**, *Department of Interdisciplinary, Gender, and  
Ethnic Studies*

Regents' Teaching Award (Tenured/Tenure Track)

**MaryKay Orgill**, *Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry*

Regents' Academic Advisor Award (Undergraduate)

**Monica Moreno**, *College of Education*

# UNIVERSITY AWARDS

## REBEL CAREER CHAMPION NETWORK AWARD

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Eileen McGarry Career Champion of the Year Award

**Joseph Ervin**, *College of Liberal Arts*

## UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES AWARD

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James S. McPhee Librarian of the Year

**Jennifer Culley**, *Collections, Discovery, and Scholarly Communication*

## RESEARCH AWARDS

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Harry Reid Silver State Research Award

**Marty Schiller**, *Nevada Institute of Personalized Medicine*

Barrick Distinguished Scholar Award

**Kenneth Czerwinski**, *Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry*

**Shashi Nambisan**, *Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Construction*

**Nancy Rapoport**, *William S. Boyd School of Law*

Barrick Scholar Award

**Emma Bloomfield**, *Department of Communication Studies*

**Joshua Island**, *Department of Physics and Astronomy*

**Jee Woong Park**, *Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Construction*

# UNIVERSITY AWARDS

## TEACHING AWARDS

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UNLV Foundation Distinguished Teaching Award (Full-time Tenured or Tenure-Track Faculty)

**MaryKay Orgill**, *Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry*

Alex G. and Faye Spanos Distinguished Teaching Award

**Christy Strong**, *School of Life Sciences*

UNLV Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award

**Eric Chiang**, *Department of Economics*

UNLV Outstanding Teaching by Part-Time Faculty Award

**Jason DeMaria**, *Lee Business School*

**Arpine Mkrтчyan**, *Department of World Languages and Cultures*

**Michael Tarby**, *Department of Health Physics and Diagnostic Sciences*

**Nikki Rose Ty-Albright**, *School of Nursing*

## ACADEMIC FACULTY AWARDS

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UNLV Distinguished Professor Award

**Matthew Lachniet**, *Department of Geoscience*

Outstanding Department Chair Award

**Christopher Cochran**, *Department of Healthcare Administration and Policy*

## LIFELONG LEARNING AWARD

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Lifelong Learning Faculty Excellence Award

**Ken Lange**, *Lifelong Learning*

# UNIVERSITY AWARDS

## MISSION FULFILLMENT, ASSESSMENT, AND ACCREDITATION AWARDS

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Mission Fulfillment Grant

**Office of Research, Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine  
at UNLV**

UNLV Accreditation Award

**Wolfgang Bein, Department of Computer Science**

Academic Assessment Award

**Jee Woong Park, Department of Civil and Environmental  
Engineering and Construction**

**Department of Physical Therapy**

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AWARDS

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Community Engagement Student Service Award

**Kyle Fairweather, Lee Business School**

Community Engagement Service-Learning Award

**Kathleen Thimsen, School of Nursing**

Community Engagement Community-Based Research  
Award

**Ying Guo, Department of Environmental and Global Health**

Community Engagement Faculty/Staff Outreach Award

**Jennifer Byrnes, Department of Anthropology**

# UNIVERSITY AWARDS

## GRADUATE COLLEGE AWARDS

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### Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching Award

1st place

**April Ursula Fox**, *Department of Educational Psychology, Leadership, and Higher Education*

2nd place

**Daphne Lu**, *Couple and Family Therapy Program*

3rd place

**Lila Hearn**, *Department of Political Science*

### Outstanding STEM Thesis Award

**Ibtihaj Ahmad**, *Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Construction*

*Thesis title: Assessment of Vegetation Dynamics After South Sugar Loaf and Snowstorm Wildfires Using Remote Sensing Spectral Indices*

### Outstanding Non-STEM Thesis Award

**Arel Wiederholt Kassar**, *Department of English*

*Thesis title: The Desert Spring Movement*

### Outstanding STEM Dissertation Award

**Christopher Giacoletto**, *Nevada Institute of Personalized Medicine*

*Dissertation title: Empowering Science with the World's First High Accuracy and High Throughput Functional Assay*

### Outstanding Non-STEM Dissertation Award

**Grace Goodwin**, *Department of Psychology*

*Dissertation title: Computational Approaches to Clinical Characterization, Diagnosis, and Intervention of Alzheimer's Disease and Behavioral Variant Frontotemporal Dementia*

### Outstanding Graduate Faculty Mentorship Award

**Helen Wing**, *School of Life Sciences*

# UNIVERSITY AWARDS

## GRADUATE COLLEGE AWARDS (CONTINUED)

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Graduate College Distinguished Service Medallion

**Phillip Burns**, *Office of Student Rights & Responsibilities*

**Christina Miskey**, *University Libraries*

**Boo Shan Tseng**, *School of Life Sciences*

## ACADEMIC ADVISING AWARDS

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Academic Advisor Award (Undergraduate)

**Monica Moreno**, *College of Education*

Academic Advisor Award (Graduate)

**Doris Watson**, *Department of Educational Psychology,  
Leadership, and Higher Education*

Academic Advising Center of the Year Award  
(Students' Choice)

**Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering Advising Center**

## ADMINISTRATIVE FACULTY AWARDS

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Administrative Faculty of the Year: Rising Star Award

**Riana Durrett**, *Cannabis Policy Institute*

Administrative Faculty of the Year: Operational Excellence

**Joy Ramiro**, *Division of Research*

Administrative Faculty of the Year: Student Service Excellence

**Rafael Oganessian**, *Office of Undergraduate Research*

Administrative Faculty of the Year: Leadership Excellence

**Jenna Heath**, *College of Liberal Arts*



## LIED LIBRARY: CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

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This year's program features the Lied Library, which is celebrating 25 years as the academic heart of UNLV. The Libraries advance student success, research, and community engagement by connecting users with knowledge, technology, and innovative learning environments. In addition to extensive collections and expert librarian support, the Lied Library has expanded services to meet evolving student needs, including the Makerspace for hands-on creation, Multimedia Studios for digital storytelling and production, Dreamscape Learn for immersive, experiential learning, and private Study Pods designed for focused, flexible work. Together, these spaces reflect Lied Library's commitment to fostering discovery, creativity, and academic achievement for every Rebel.



# IN MEMORIAM

We express our deepest condolences to the co-workers, friends, and loved ones of those who have passed away. We are incredibly grateful for their service to UNLV and the legacies they leave behind.

## **Paul Burns**

Emeritus Professor and Administrator  
Department of History  
College of Liberal Arts  
32 years of service

## **John Filler**

Emeritus Professor  
Department of Early Childhood, Multilingual  
and Special Education  
College of Education  
33 years of service

## **Thomas Jones**

Associate Professor  
William F. Harrah College of Hospitality  
25 years of service

# IN MEMORIAM

## **Ed Jorgensen**

Associate Professor in Residence  
Department of Computer Science  
Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering  
37+ years of service

## **Kay Kindred**

Emerita Professor of Law  
William S. Boyd School of Law  
25 years of service

## **Stuart Mann**

Emeritus Dean  
William F. Harrah College of Hospitality  
12 years of service

## **John Stefanelli**

Emeritus Professor  
William F. Harrah College of Hospitality  
33 years of service

## **Terri Thompson**

Director of Administrative Services  
Office of Information Technology  
22+ years of service to NSHE

# UNIT AWARDS

In addition to university-wide recognition, individual units also honor outstanding faculty and staff in their units:

## ACADEMIC ADVISING

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Academic Advising Center Excellence in Efficiency  
(Student Choice)

**College of Liberal Arts Wilson Advising Center**

Academic Advising Center Most Welcoming Award  
(Student Choice)

**Honors College Advising Center**

Academic Advising Center Quality of Service Award  
(Student Choice)

**Greenspun College of Urban Affairs Advising Center**

## LEE BUSINESS SCHOOL

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Lee Business School Teacher of the Year

**Michael Lee**, *Department of Information Systems*

Lee Business School Researcher of the Year

**Andrew Hardin**, *Department of Information Systems*

Lee Business School Distinguished Service Award

**Nicholas Irwin**, *Department of Economics*

## SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE

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Excellence Among Classified Staff

**Michelle Hernandez**

Research Excellence

**Neamat Hassan**

# UNIT AWARDS

## SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE (CONTINUED)

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Teaching Excellence

**Linh Nguyen**

**Ron Lemon**

Service Excellence

**Melissa Lezama**

Excellence in Clinical Practice

**Tina Brandon Abbatangelo**

**Michael Webberson**

## HOWARD R. HUGHES COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

---

Distinguished Teacher Award

**Grzegorz Chmaj**, *Department of Applied and Interdisciplinary Engineering*

Distinguished Researcher Award

**Paul Oh**, *Department of Mechanical Engineering*

## HONORS COLLEGE

---

Department in Honors Teaching Award

**Daniel Siciliano**, *Department of Accounting*

Honors College Service Award

**Dan Bubb**, *Honors College*

## WILLIAM F. HARRAH COLLEGE OF HOSPITALITY

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The William F. Harrah College of Hospitality will hold their unit's award ceremony in May.

# UNIT AWARDS

## SCHOOL OF INTEGRATED HEALTH SCIENCES

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Distinguished Service Award

**Lisa Taylor**, *Department of Physical Therapy*

Distinguished Teaching Award

**Tedd Girouard**, *Department of Kinesiology and Nutrition Sciences*

Career Service Award

**John Mercer**, *Department of Kinesiology and Nutrition Sciences*

Classified Staff Service Award

**Monica Rosales**, *Department of Physical Therapy*

Administrative Faculty Service Award

**Steven Slivka**, *Dean's Office*

## COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

---

William Morris Award for Excellence in Scholarship

**Wendy Chen**, *Department of English*

**Nicole Short**, *Department of Psychology*

William Morris Award for Excellence in Teaching

**Margarita Jara**, *Department of World Languages and Cultures*

Catherine Gullo Bellver Career Achievement Award in Liberal Arts

**Barbara Roth**, *Department of Anthropology*

COLA Faculty Diversity Award

**Chenghui Zhang**, *Department of Sociology*

Donald Schmiedel Lifetime Service Award

**Michael Green**, *Department of History*

# UNIT AWARDS

## COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS (CONTINUED)

---

Faculty-in-Residence Award for Excellence in Teaching

**Nicholas Barron**, *Department of Anthropology*

Rita Deanin Abbey Teacher of the Year

**Amy Reed-Sandoval**, *Department of Philosophy*

James Frey Senior Faculty Excellence in Scholarship Award

**James Hyman**, *Department of Psychology*

## UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

---

Outstanding Library Faculty Scholarship Award

**Mark Lenker**, *Research Education-Educational Initiatives*

Administrative Faculty of the Year Award

**Liliana Avila-Estrada**, *Administration-Human Resources*

## LIFELONG LEARNING

---

The Mike Cutler Instructor of the Year Award

**Danielle Hartnett**, *Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UNLV*

The Elena Cieslak & Cliff Reay Service Award

**John and Vicky Birkland**, *Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UNLV*

Distinguished Member of the Year

**Anthony Kouffman**, *Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UNLV*

# UNIT AWARDS

## SCHOOL OF NURSING

---

Outstanding Didactic Teaching

**Amber Wojciechowicz**

Outstanding Clinical Teaching

**Ericka Yelle**

Outstanding Service

**Carly Pasquale**

Outstanding Scholarship

**Jennifer Vanderlaan**

## SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

---

Excellence in Teaching

**Miguel Fudolig**, *Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics*

Excellence in Research

**Jason Flatt**, *Department of Social and Behavioral Health*

Excellence in Service

**Amanda Haboush-Deloye**, *Department of Social and Behavioral Health*

# UNIT AWARDS

## COLLEGE OF SCIENCES

---

Distinguished Teaching

**Joshua Reagan**, *Mathematics Learning Center*

Distinguished Service

**Christy Strong**, *School of Life Sciences*

Distinguished Research

**Arya Udry**, *Department of Geoscience*

Distinguished Administrative Faculty

**Sabrina Barakat**, *Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry*

## GREENSPUN COLLEGE OF URBAN AFFAIRS

---

Excellence in Teaching

**Susan Cunningham**, *Department of Communication Studies*

Excellence in Research

**Garrett Pace**, *School of Social Work*

Excellence in Service

**Helen Neill**, *School of Public Policy and Leadership*

Collaboration, Leadership, and Innovation

**Matt Gyger**, *School of Social Work*





UNLV appreciates the leadership and support of our  
Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents.

Byron Brooks, Chair

Stephanie Goodman, Vice Chair

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Pete Goicoechea

Jennifer J. McGrath

Keri D. Nikolajewski

*Chief of Staff to the Board of Regents*



**Special thank you to:**

**Interim President Chris Heavey**

**Acting Executive Vice President and Provost Kate Korgan**

**All presenters and volunteers**

**Colleagues, friends, and family of our honorees**