Outstanding Faculty to Receive Awards at Commencement
Susan Diehl, Robert H. Davis, Donn Weinholtz, David Pines, Joshua Russell, Robert Sinche
Posted 5/7/2013

Six faculty members will be honored for their exceptional achievements during the University's undergraduate Commencement ceremony on Sunday, May 19.

Awards will be presented for outstanding accomplishments in the areas of teaching, scholarship, service, and contributions to the All-University Curriculum. In addition, the Belle K. Ribicoff Junior Faculty Prize and the first-ever Belle K. Ribicoff Endowed Professorship will be awarded.

In addition to the six faculty awards mentioned above, the University Medal for Distinguished Service will be presented to former Hartt School dean and University Professor of Theatre Malcolm Morrison. (Read about the recognition for Morrison.)

Faculty Award Recipients

Susan H. Diehl, associate professor in the Department of Health Sciences and Nursing, College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions (ENHP), is this year’s recipient of the Roy E. Larsen Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Diehl earns high praise from the many students she has taught and mentored in her 13 years as a faculty member in the University’s nursing program. Since 2006, the Office of Career Services has done an annual survey of University graduates and asked them to name the faculty member who had the greatest impact on them. In the seven years of survey results, Diehl has ranked first three different times in the number of accolades received from her students. “No other faculty member has achieved such distinction,” notes John Kniering, director of Career Services.

Diehl inspires good nurses to become great nurses—to think and act proactively, and to take responsibility for their profession. The nurses who have benefited from her teaching and mentoring are working as nursing-education and public-health leaders across the state. In addition to teaching, Diehl has worked as a nurse practitioner for VNA Health Care and Healthy Families Connecticut. She currently works with Common Ground in the Northeast Neighborhood Health Initiative in Hartford.

This year’s James E. and Frances W. Bent Award for Scholarly and/or Artistic Creativity will go to Robert H. Davis, professor of theatre in The Hartt School.

With more than 25 years of experience as a professional actor, director, and voice coach, in addition to his exceptional teaching, Davis is an ideal recipient of the Bent Award. In his 12 years at the University of Hartford, Davis has earned the reputation of a master teacher while directing numerous acclaimed University productions, including The Taming of the Shrew, Henry V, and Julius Caesar. He has worked with a number of renowned regional theatres around the country.

Davis is the recipient of a Connecticut Critics Circle Award for his performance in The Exonerated at TheaterWorks in Hartford, and his direction of Equus at the Playhouse on Park in West Hartford received a Broadway World.com best director award. He is a mainstay at the Hartford Stage.
Company, having appeared in productions of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; A Christmas Carol;* and *Our Town,* in which he shared the role of Stage Manager with the venerable Hal Holbrook. Davis also is devoted to bringing Shakespeare to young audiences in underserved communities.

Donn Weinholtz, professor of educational leadership, ENHP, will receive the Oscar and Shoshana Trachtenberg Award for Sustained Service to the University.

Weinholtz, who is a former dean of ENHP, has provided exceptional service to his department, his college, the University, and the community over more than two decades. A former chair of the Faculty Senate, Weinholtz currently serves on the Senate (third term), the Graduate Council, the Regents’ Advancement Committee, and the Athletics Council. Previously, he co-chaired the committee that established the University of Hartford Magnet School, and he helped create the Hartford Urban Education Network and the Connecticut Alliance of Concerned Educators.

As dean, Weinholtz helped increase ENHP’s enrollment from 660 to 1,560 students. He also assumed responsibility for the Educational Main Street program, doubling its size. As department chair, he oversaw the evolution of the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership from a K–12 program to a higher-education program while expanding enrollment.

David Pines, associate professor of civil, environmental, and biomedical engineering in the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture (CETA), is the recipient of the Donald W. Davis All-University Curriculum Award.

The All-University Curriculum (AUC) is an innovative program of cross-disciplinary courses that allow students to explore the depth and breadth of a liberal arts education. The Donald W. Davis Award honors a faculty member who has made outstanding contributions to the AUC and to interdisciplinary education.

Pines embodies the concept of interdisciplinary learning and what it is capable of achieving. Over the past six years, he has brought together students, faculty, and professionals from such fields as engineering, graphic design, business, and sociology to tackle real-life projects in developing countries around the world. The interdisciplinary courses that Pines has created have provided transformational experiences for students—and for residents of the communities where the projects have taken place.

Working under the umbrella of Engineers Without Borders, the interdisciplinary teams have created water supply systems for a village in rural India, helped to develop and promote a sustainable form of agriculture in western Kenya, and helped to relocate and restore historic sugar mills on the Caribbean island of St. Vincent.

The Belle K. Ribicoff Junior Faculty Prize, now in its fifth year, will be awarded to Joshua Russell, assistant professor of music education in The Hartt School. The prize recognizes an outstanding junior faculty member in a tenure-track position who has not yet been tenured. The prize was established through a generous gift from Belle K. Ribicoff, a longtime supporter and life regent of the University.

In just four years at The Hartt School, Russell has already made a mark in the field of music education, compiling an exceptional record of achievement in research, teaching, and service. He has presented his research nationally
and internationally, and has published peer-reviewed articles in some of the most prestigious journals in the music education field.

Russell has been appointed to the editorial review boards of the *Journal of Research in Music Education* and the *String Research Journal*, and in 2012 he became the first-ever recipient of the American String Teachers Association’s Emergent String Researcher Award. Russell also excels as a teacher, garnering consistently high student evaluations. Since arriving at Hartt, he has worked to redesign the string pedagogy classes, and has restructured many of the graduate music education research courses as well. Russell recently became the director of doctoral studies in music education.

**Belle Ribicoff** also established a rotating *endowed professorship*, to be awarded every four years to one of the recipients of the Ribicoff Junior Faculty Prize from the previous three years. **Bryan Sinche**, associate professor of English in the College of Arts and Sciences, has been selected as the first recipient of the Belle K. Ribicoff Endowed Professorship, and will be recognized at Commencement.

Sinche is a scholar of antebellum American literature and pre-1900 African American literature, and he is widely admired for his ability to balance the competing demands of teaching, scholarship, and service to the University community. During his seven years at the University, Sinche has taught 25 different courses on topics ranging from Melville and Faulkner to the Black Arts Movement and the literature of the American South. Students praise his courses as challenging, thought-provoking, and inspirational.

Sinche’s articles on 19th-century American and African American literature have been published in a number of prestigious essay collections and peer-reviewed journals. Sinche, who will be on sabbatical in the academic year 2013–14, plans to use the endowed professorship to support a book project tentatively titled “Shining Like New Money: Economics and African American Literature, 1789–1914.”

(from Unotes September 25, 2013)