

Three Liberal Arts Faculty Recognized for Teaching Excellence, Concern for Students — View From Ventress

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(l to r) Katherine Fields, Beth Ann Fennelly, and Eric Thomas Weber

Three outstanding faculty members in the University of Mississippi's College of Liberal Arts have been selected as top teachers and awarded \$1,000 prizes and engraved plaques.

The 2010-11 honored faculty and their awards are Beth Ann Fennelly, associate professor of English, Outstanding Teacher in the College of Liberal Arts; Eric Thomas Weber, assistant professor of public policy

leadership, Cora Lee Graham Award for Outstanding Teaching of Freshmen; and Katherine Fields, instructor of art, Outstanding Instructor in the College of Liberal Arts.

The selection process involved nominations from students and fellow faculty, which were considered by a committee of former recipients based on criteria that includes excellence in class instruction, intellectual stimulation of students and concern for students' welfare.

The nomination letters followed a theme of selflessness, professional passion and individual attention to students.



Beth Ann Fennelly, associate professor of English, Outstanding Teacher in the College of Liberal Arts

One student nominating Fennelly wrote: "When I get advice from Fennelly, I know to think long and hard on it, because she has." Another said, "She expects a lot of her students and puts in the effort to help (them) achieve their best."

Of Weber, one wrote: "His approachable personality, desire to help students grow and – most of all – his passion for education make him worthy of this award."

One student writing for Fields said, "She is always willing to do anything above and beyond to help you with being the best that you can be."

Each of the three recipients received validation of their worthiness for the awards from the chairs of their departments.

"Professor Beth Ann Fennelly greatly deserves this teaching award, because of her dedication to her students," said Ivo Kamps, English department chair. "Not only does she direct our MFA program and recruit graduate students for it, she also trains and mentors many of the aspiring young poets in our department. As a widely published and nationally recognized poet, she brings the kind of expertise and credibility into the classroom that inspires our students and gives them what they need to succeed."

Fennelly said she felt “honored and gratified” to have been selected.

“To me, it’s a verification that the time and passion I’ve invested in my teaching has been appreciated,” she said. “Often, I feel that I’ve helped a student, and sometimes one takes the time to tell me so. I take pleasure in that, and in following my students’ successes. But this is a new kind of honor for me – to think that various students took the time to nominate me, and that my teaching career is being recognized when there are so many fabulous teachers here at Ole Miss. This recognition inspires me to continue believing that when we teach with insight and passion, we can influence the lives of our students for the better.”



Eric Thomas Weber, assistant professor of public policy leadership, Cora Lee Graham Award for Outstanding Teaching of Freshmen

Weber said, “It is a great honor to have been selected for the Cora Lee Graham award. Its emphasis on the teaching of freshmen means a lot to me, since freshmen are new on campus and have a lot to juggle as they are introduced to college life. We sometimes do not see the products of our teaching until a few semesters pass, furthermore, so to be recognized for work with freshmen means that even teachers’ early efforts are appreciated.”

Robert Haws, chair of public policy leadership, lauded Weber, saying, “Eric is an excellent classroom teacher and very deserving of this award. He supervises student writing with great skill and is very generous with his time.”

Likewise, Sheri Fleck Rieth, art chair, offered kudos to Fields for being chosen to receive the inaugural Outstanding Instructor Award, saying, “Katherine Rhodes Fields is an excellent teacher. I see it when I visit her classes and when I hear her in critique with her students. The things I feel so strongly should be taught are coming from her mouth, hands and heart, and Katherine pulls the very best work from the hands and the hearts of her students.”

Reacting to her selection, Fields said, “For me, the recognition that comes with this inaugural award is twofold. It is first an outward and visible sign that my students, colleagues and alma mater are pleased with my diligence toward teaching at Ole Miss. Secondly and most vitally, it provides an internal cue confirming choices, as well as feeds my creative energies as an artist and educator.”



Katherine Fields, instructor of art, Outstanding Instructor in the College of Liberal Arts

Fields, who joined the UM faculty in 2008, holds an MFA in studio art from the University of Mississippi. She attended the Glasgow School of Art (Scotland) and completed her bachelor’s degree at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee.

Weber has been teaching at the university since fall 2007. He holds a doctorate from Southern Illinois University and master’s from Ohio University, both in philosophy. His bachelor’s in philosophy and communication studies is from Vanderbilt University.

Fennelly joined the faculty in 2002. She completed a post-doctorate fellowship at the University of Wisconsin, MFA at the University of Arkansas and bachelor’s at the University of Notre Dame.