

**2026
EMPLOYEE
AWARDS
CEREMONY**

May 5, 2026



COLUMBUS STATE
UNIVERSITY

EMPLOYEE AWARDS CEREMONY

May 5, 2026

WELCOME

President Stuart Rayfield

YEARS OF SERVICE & COUGAR MILESTONE RECOGNITIONS

Tamara Wade
Chief Human Resources Officer

RETIREE & EMERITI RECOGNITIONS

Tamara Wade
Chief Human Resources Officer

Dr. Dustin Anderson
Provost & Chief Academic Officer

L.I.V.E. CSU & CAMPUS CULTURE RECOGNITIONS

Breana Jones
Director, Leadership Institute

President Stuart Rayfield

CULTURE IN ACTION STAFF AWARDS

Takeia Mosala
Staff Co-Chair, Culture Work Crew

Maya Shakoor
Employee Experience Coordinator

FACULTY EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Dr. Dustin Anderson
Provost & Chief Academic Officer

Dr. Kimberly Gill
Interim Director of Faculty Affairs

CLOSING REMARKS

President Stuart Rayfield

YEARS OF SERVICE RECOGNITIONS

FIVE YEARS OF SERVICE

Ismael Bhatti
*Office of the Provost &
Chief Academic Officer*

Adam Bova
Dept. of Communication

Drew Burgering
Printing Services

Kaylyn Carlisle
*Office of Strategic
Communication + Marketing*

Glenville Challenger
Office of Admissions

Elizabeth Chess
Office of Student Success

Laquan Clark
Printing Services

Steven Conley
University Operations

Christopher Connally
University Police Department

Jae' Cooper
University Operations

Jamie Cornell
University Operations

Chinh Dang
*University Information &
Technology Services*

Jessica Davis
*University Information &
Technology Services*

Nancy Derums
Libraries

Tracey Esmann
*College of Education &
Health Professions*

Johnathon Fritzyk
Office of the Registrar

Kevin Gibson
University Police Department

Rashunda Gooch
University Operations

Lillian Harrell
Division of Enrollment Services

Felicia Harris
University Advancement

Dontreal Jackson-Ross
Dept. of English

Mohammad Jafari
Robotics Engineering

Sylvia James
University Operations

Stephen Jessup
Dept of Earth & Space Sciences

Deborah Kidder
Dept. of Accounting & Finance

Nicol Lewis
*University Information &
Technology Services*

Tory Lewis
Office of Admissions

Nickelow Morrison
School of Nursing

Jessica Phelps
*University Information &
Technology Services*

Jacob Reuschling
*Oxbow Meadows Environmental
Learning Center*

Victoria Richter
*Joyce & Henry Schwob School of
Music*

Scott Scott
University Operations

Maya Shakoor
Office of Human Resources

Sarah Sharpe
*Dept. of Teacher Education,
Leadership & Counseling*

Caleb Stone
University Operations

Erin Tan
CSU Libraries

Shaneka Thrash
Office of Student Success

Jennifer VanSlander
*Dept. of Teacher Education,
Leadership & Counseling*

10 YEARS OF SERVICE

Parul Acharya
*Dept. of Teacher Education,
Leadership & Counseling*

Tara Beard
Office of Human Resources

Xianjing "Jasmine" Bordere
Dept. of Accounting & Finance

James Cook
Dept. of Accounting & Finance

Gabriel Dukes
Office of Financial Aid

Steven Dunn
University Operations

Kate Early
*Dept. of Kinesiology &
Health Sciences*

Brian Evans
Athletics Department

Hillary Fleenor
*Office of the Provost & Chief
Academic Officer*

Venus Frank
Office of Human Resources

Vallory Ginn
*Division of Legal Affairs, Ethics &
Compliance*

Marty Golden
University Operations

Sandy Gore
University Operations

Samantha Miller Gurski
*Continuing & Professional
Education*

Ross Hodge
Coca-Cola Space Science Center

Lavetta Holiday
University Operations

Breana Jones
The Leadership Institute

Daewoo Lee
*School of Policy, Justice &
Public Safety*

Yoon Sang Lee
*Dept. of Management &
Marketing*

William Kelly
University Operations

Rocky Kettering
University Advancement

Yvette Maxwell
Center for Academic Coaching

William "Billy" Mixon
Command College

YEARS OF SERVICE RECOGNITIONS

Rodrigo "Rod" Obando
Office of the Registrar

Heather Orenstein
Office of Admissions

Patricia Patrick
*Dept. of Teacher Education,
Leadership & Counseling*

Carrie Perkins
Testing Center

Thomas Rice
University Operations

Erick Richman
*Dept. of Kinesiology &
Health Sciences*

Wen Shi
Dept. of Accounting & Finance

Brandt Smith
Dept. of Psychology

Uma Sridharan
Dept. of Accounting & Finance

Ria Stringfellow
Office of the President

Kerri Taylor
Dept. of Chemistry

Natalia Temesgen
Dept. of English

Lixin Wang
TSYS School of Computer Science

Tammy Whorton
University Support Services

15 YEARS OF SERVICE

Erinn Bentley
*Dept. of Teacher Education,
Leadership & Counseling*

Benjamin Blair
Dept. of Accounting & Finance

Jennifer Brown
*Dept. of Teacher Education,
Leadership & Counseling*

Amber Dees
*Office of the Provost & Chief
Academic Officer*

Steven Diaz
University Support Services

Houbin Fang
Dept. of Mathematics

Keith Grier II
*University Information &
Technology Services*

Loriane Favoretto Hill
*Dept. of Kinesiology & Health
Sciences*

Brandon Joiner
*University Information &
Technology Services*

Stanley "Drew" Jones
*Office of Institutional Research &
Effectiveness*

Jennifer Joyner
University Advancement

Matthew Killingsworth
University Police Department

Judith Livingston
Dept. of English

Robert Lefler
Dept. of Art

Saoussan Maarouf
*Dept. of Teacher Education,
Leadership & Counseling*

Joseph Miller
Dept. of English

Jennifer Newbrey
Dept. of Biology

Deniz Peker
*Dept. of Teacher Education,
Leadership & Counseling*

Sundi Rose
Dept. of English

Kele Tinsley
Shared Administrative Services

David Turner
Dept. of Theatre & Dance

20 YEARS OF SERVICE

Mark Akridge
University Support Services

Madhusudan Bhandary
Dept. of Mathematics

Alicia Bryan
*Dept. of Kinesiology &
Health Sciences*

Monica Cavender
Office of Financial Aid

Tamara Condrey
School of Nursing

Monica Frazier
Dept. of Biology

Yulandra Hall
University Operations

Kirk Heriot
*Dept. of Management &
Marketing*

Johnny Ho
*Dept. of Management &
Marketing*

Stephanie Jackson
University Operations

Troy Keller
Dept. of Earth & Space Sciences

Julio Llanos
Athletics Department

Masako Okura
*School of Policy, Justice &
Public Safety*

Sergio Schwartz
*Joyce & Henry Schwob School of
Music*

Joshua Smith
University Police Department

Gary Sprayberry
*Dept. of History, Geography &
Philosophy*

Lydia Ray
TSYS School of Computer Science

Troy Vidal
*School of Policy, Justice &
Public Safety*

YEARS OF SERVICE RECOGNITIONS

25 YEARS OF SERVICE

Tessie Aina
Office of Procurement & Travel

Jacqueline Carter
Warehouse & Postal Services

John Finley
Dept. of Management & Marketing

Danna Gibson
Dept. of Communication

Evan Isaacs
Athletics Department

Andree Martin
Joyce & Henry Schwab School of Music

Bradley Palmer
Joyce & Henry Schwab School of Music

Douglas Tompson
Dept. of History, Geography & Philosophy

Anthony Pritchett
Warehouse & Postal Services

30 YEARS OF SERVICE

Steven Graver
Dept. of Theatre & Dance

Brenda Ito
Dept. of Theatre & Dance

Sallie Averitt Miller
Dept. of Teacher Education, Leadership & Counseling

Brian Schwartz
Dept. of Biology

Florence Wakoko
Dept. of Society, Culture & Languages

35 YEARS OF SERVICE

Abiye Seifu
Robotics Engineering

COUGAR MILESTONE RECOGNITION

Cougar Milestones recognize the exceptional tenure of our full-time colleagues whose service to Columbus State exceeds 30 years but is between their five- and 10-year anniversary milestones.

Fonda Carter
Dept. of Accounting & Finance
38 years

David Schwimmer
Dept. of Earth & Space Sciences
48 years

RETIREE RECOGNITIONS

Valerie Alexander

*Executive Director, Enterprise
Operations & Infrastructure
University Information & Support
Services*
June 2026 ▪ 29 years

Carolyn Baker

*Custodian Team Lead
University Operations*
December 2025 ▪ 24 years

Estel Bouyer

*Police Dispatcher
University Police Department*
September 2025 ▪ 21 years

Jacqueline Carter

*Postal Services Clerk
Warehouse & Postal Services*
September 2026 ▪ 25 years

Dutch Cummings

*Administrative Coordinator,
Visitor Services
Coca-Cola Space Science Ctr.*
January 2026 ▪ 24 years

James "Jimbo" Davis

*Assistant Athletic Director for
Development & Stewardship
Athletics Department and
University Advancement*
June 2026 ▪ 28 years

Talley Dentzau

*Student Services Coordinator
Dept. of Teacher Education,
Leadership & Counseling*
March 2026 ▪ 11 years

Steven Graver

*Professor
Dept. of Theatre & Dance*
June 2026 ▪ 29 years

Vickie Hall

*Custodian I
University Operations*
October 2025 ▪ 28 years

Susan Hrach

*Director of the Faculty Center and
Professor of English
Office of the Provost & Chief
Academic Officer and
Dept. of English*
July 2026 ▪ 26 years

Elizabeth Klar

*Senior Lecturer
Dept. of Biology*
June 2026 ▪ 16 years

Dana Larkin

*Associate Dean of Students
Division of Student Affairs*
September 2026 ▪ 28 years

Sandra Lewack

*Executive Assistant
University Advancement*
June 2026 ▪ 11 years

Ellen McDaniel

*Registered Nurse
Student Health Center*
March 2026 ▪ 16 years

Alan "Scott" Norman

*Manager, Challenger Learning
Center
Coca-Cola Space Science Ctr.*
January 2026 ▪ 28 years

Robert "Nick" Norwood

*Professor and Director of the
Carson McCullers Center
Dept. of English*
August 2026 ▪ 24 years

Ramesh Rao

*Professor
Dept. of Communication*
June 2026 ▪ 13 years

Gina Sheeks

*Vice President, Student Affairs
Division of Student Affairs*
February 2026 ▪ 33 years

Troy Vidal

*Associate Professor
School of Policy, Justice &
Public Safety*
June 2026 ▪ 19 years

Melanie White

*Chief Budget Officer
Budget Office*
September 2026 ▪ 28 years

Cheryl Yatsko

*Assistant Director
Counseling Center*
January 2026 ▪ 25 years

EMERITI RECOGNITION

Anil Banerjee

*Dept. of Chemistry
Professor Emeritus*

Joesph Golden

*Joyce & Henry Schwob School of Music
Professor Emeritus*

Joseph McCallus

*Dept. of English
Professor Emeritus*

Lawrence McDonald

*Dept. of Theatre & Dance
Professor Emeritus*

L.I.V.E. CSU RECOGNITIONS

L.I.V.E. CSU is Columbus State's internal leadership development program for all employees to learn and practice what it means to Learn, Invest, Value and Engage with our students, colleagues and partners as they work to identify, explore and improve their leadership style.

ELEV8

ELEV8, a collaboration between the Office of Human Resources and The Leadership Institute, equips leaders with the skills to lead more effective teams. It is required of new managers and supervisors.

Bailey Brado

*Campus Experience Coordinator
Office of Admissions*

Jill Carroll

*Development Director
University Advancement*

Jessica Davis

*IT Support Technician &
Procurement Specialist
University Information &
Technology Services*

Amber Dees

*Director of Accreditation &
Compliance
Office of the Provost &
Chief Academic Officer*

Brandon Furnish

*GIS Project Manager
Office of the Provost &
Chief Academic Officer*

Whit Gaines

*Head of Library Systems &
eResources
CSU Libraries*

Randy Garver

*Assistant Director
Center of Online Learning*

Kenny Gray

*Director
Center for Academic Coaching*

Vernita Harris

*Assistant Director
Continuing & Professional
Education*

Carlie Hinson

*Assistant Director, Orientation &
Parent Programs
Office of Student Life &
Development*

Lauren Johnson

*Assistant Director
Oxbow Meadows Environmental
Learning Center*

Debra Kennedy

*Chief of Police
University Police Department*

Jennifer Lovelace

*Assistant Professor of Higher
Education and Director, Doctoral
Programs
Dept. of Teacher Education,
Leadership & Counseling*

Chloe McArdle

*Assistant Director, Business
Operations
Office of Residence Life*

William "Brian" Muse

*Department Chair and Professor
Dept. of Mathematics*

Ronnet Rice

*Director of Advancement Services
& University Stewardship
University Advancement*

Erin Tan

*Head of Access Services
CSU Libraries*

Mark Whitesel

*Associate Vice President for
Student Affairs & Dean of
Students
Division of Student Affairs*

ESSENTIALS

Essentials is a curriculum designed for all new faculty and staff.

Kyndall Cason

*Student Teaching Coordinator
Center for Quality Teaching &
Learning*

Reginald Gooden

*Career Success Coach
Center for Career Coaching*

Wytinsea Jones

*Academic Success Coach
Center for Academic Coaching*

Jeffrey Kozee

*Academic Success Coach
Center for Academic Coaching*

Megan Li

*Financial Aid Counselor
Office of Financial Aid*

Randy McCoin

*Career Success Coach
Center for Career Coaching*

Cassandra Montesclaros

*Academic Success Coach
Center for Academic Coaching*

Yvette Moore

*College Coordinator &
Assistant to the Dean
D. Abbott Turner College of
Business & Technology*

Kelsey Sheets

*Purchasing Specialist
Office of Purchasing & Travel*

Marsha Taylor

*Academic Success Coach
Center for Academic Coaching*

Devin Yerkins

*Student Account Specialist
Office of Student Account
Services*

CAMPUS CULTURE RECOGNITIONS

PRESIDENTIAL FELLOWS

This group of 12 volunteers—comprising four staff, four faculty and four students—served during the 2025-26 academic year to help the president gain insights into the student and employee experience at Columbus State. Notably, the group designed and presented two professional development sessions focused on enhancing employees' civil discourse skills, using the popular YouTube series "Hot Ones" as a creative theme.

Adam Bova
Dept. of Communication

Yulandra Hall
University Operations

Oula Weaver
Counseling Center

Hillary Fleenor
Academic Center for Tutoring

Jeremy Newton
Dept. of Psychology

Beth Wisham
Center for Academic Coaching

Randy Garver
Center of Online Learning

Deryus Tilman
School of Nursing

CULTURE WORK CREW

This group of employee volunteers creates and executes initiatives and programs that support Columbus State's vision of an ideal culture. This year, their focus included introducing the MentorMatch initiative, the Month of Gratitude in November, the Culture-Champion process, and the redesign of the Employee Staff Awards.

Takeia Mosala
Staff Co-Chair
Division of Legal Affairs, Ethics & Compliance

Susan Lovell
Military Connected Student Services

Erica Taylor
College of Education & Health Professions

Lauren Neal
Faculty Co-chair
Dept. of Teacher Education, Leadership & Counseling

Xavier Matthews
Men's & Women's Cross Country and Track & Field

Mark Whitesel
Office of the Dean of Students

Craig Butera
Organizational Effectiveness

Bobby Nixon
Dept. of Society, Culture & Languages

Courtney Wilson
William B. Turner Center for Servant Leadership

Jennifer Lovelace
Dept. of Teacher Education, Leadership & Counseling

Chelsea Powell
Leadership Institute

Michelle Zeller
Dept. of Marketing & Management

Maya Shakoor
Employee Experience and Office of Human Resources

MENTORMATCH PARTICIPANTS

The MentorMatch program is a volunteer-based initiative that connects interested employees through mentoring partnerships to foster growth and broaden both professional and personal networks. It offers great flexibility, enabling each mentor-mentee pair to tailor their experience to their specific interests and objectives.

October 2025 to March 2026 Mentors-Mentees Cohort

Valerie Alexander
University Information & Technology Services

Dustin Anderson
Office of the Provost & Chief Academic Officer

Elke Brumbaugh
TSYS School of Computer Science

CAMPUS CULTURE RECOGNITIONS

Jill Carroll

University Advancement

Jess Davis

*University Information &
Technology Services*

Jacoba Durrell

Center for Career Coaching

Ben Kamau

College of Letters & Sciences

Tesa Leonce-Regalado

*D. Abbott Turner College of
Business & Technology*

John Lester

Office of the President

Susan Lovell

*Military-Connected
Student Services*

Randy McCain

Center for Career Coaching

Nikki Minneman

Office of Residence Life

William "Billy" Mixon

Command College

Stuart Rayfield

Office of the President

Dani Rouse

*Office of the Provost &
Chief Academic Officer*

Jennifer Stone

*D. Abbott Turner College of
Business & Technology*

Brian Tyo

*Dept. of Kinesiology &
Health Sciences*

Mark Whitesel

Office of the Dean of Students

Annice Yarber-Allen

*Office of the Provost &
Chief Academic Officer*

Margie Yates

*College of Education &
Health Professions*

January to June 2026 Mentors-Mentees Cohort

Bryan Banks

*CSU Libraries and
Graduate School*

Meg Cole

Office of Residence Life

Julianna Cowser

Dept. of Art

Pat Donahoe

Division of Business & Finance

Bernesia Duroseau

Dept. of Mathematics

Dawn Frazier

*Honors College and the
Dept. of Teacher Education,
Leadership & Counseling*

Whitley Hall

*Division of Legal Affairs,
Ethics & Compliance*

Crystal Harris

*Office of Student Accounts &
Accounts Receivable*

Lawanna Hayes

*Office of the Vice President for
Business & Finance*

Ed Helton

University Advancement

Rania Hodhod

*TSYS School of
Computer Science*

Necia Hughes

Office of Residence Life

Dana Larkin

Office of the Dean of Students

Mattison Laster

Office of Admissions

Nicol Lewis

*University Information &
Technology Services*

Tiffany McBride

Dept. of Communication

Takeia Mosala

*Division of Legal Affairs, Ethics &
Compliance*

Tom Ngo

*Dept. of Marketing &
Management*

Sarah Secoy

*Center of Accommodation &
Access*

Eric Spears

*Center for Global Engagement
and Dept. of History, Geography
& Philosophy*

Cindy Ticknor

Honors College

Oula Weaver

Counseling Center

Kristin Williams

Office of Admissions

Beth Wisham

Center for Academic Coaching

Devin Yerkins

*Office of Student Accounts &
Accounts Receivable*

Melissa Young

Office of Student Success

CULTURE IN ACTION STAFF AWARDS

This year, we have aligned our six staff awards with our efforts to strengthen and enrich our workplace culture so that all employees feel valued, supported, inspired and fulfilled. Our new Culture in Action awards emphasize our values of practicing servant leadership, building community, empowering others, seeking efficiency, innovating, practicing accountability and connecting with others.

WILL BURGAN

Program Coordinator

Center for Accommodation & Access

Division of Student Affairs

Will Burgan practices servant leadership daily by advocating for and empowering students to reach their full potential. His work in supporting visually impaired students is a masterclass in building community and removing barriers. By collaborating with community partners to improve Braille signage in downtown Columbus and researching innovative ways to provide Braille music for student performers, Will ensures that every student has access to the full educational experience.

Will's commitment to efficiency and innovation is reflected in his overhaul of departmental software to improve data collection and support outcome-based decision-making. He further demonstrates accountability by pursuing International Coaching Federation certification to better support student growth. By connecting students with community resources and providing consistent, weekly mentorship, Will models the very best of our institutional values. His proactive approach and dedication to service have made a lasting impact on the accessibility and culture of our university.

KATIE CANNON, GCPCA

Purchasing Coordinator

Office of Purchasing & Travel

Division of Business & Finance

Katie Cannon exemplifies Columbus State's core values through a unique blend of technical excellence and genuine care for others. In her role within the Office of Purchasing & Travel, Katie champions efficiency and accountability. Her meticulous attention to detail and focus on compliance protect institutional resources while streamlining the P-Card process for the entire campus. Rather than simply enforcing policy, Katie takes the time to empower others, providing the knowledge and support they need to work confidently and independently.

As chair of the Staff Council, Katie's leadership has been instrumental in building community and fostering open dialogue across departments. She leads with humility and action, organizing initiatives that unite and energize the staff. By making every individual feel seen and valued, Katie fosters a culture of trust and collaboration. Columbus State is fortunate to benefit from her integrity, her proactive problem-solving, and her unwavering dedication to the well-being of our campus community.

DR. MELISSA DEMPSEY

Assistant Dean, Student Engagement

Division of Student Affairs

Dr. Melissa Dempsey is a model of servant leadership, consistently stepping beyond her role to elevate the campus experience. Her commitment to accountability and strategic planning has been vital to the success of high-impact initiatives such as our reimagined First-Year Convocation and the renovation of the Davidson Student Center. By carefully considering stakeholder impact and long-term sustainability, Melissa builds trust across teams and ensures that university projects are executed at the highest level.

CULTURE IN ACTION STAFF AWARDS

Equally impactful is Melissa's talent for empowering others and building community. She creates environments where innovation is encouraged and expectations are clear, allowing both students and professional staff to grow into confident leaders. Her ability to lead with both professionalism and warmth ensures that those around her feel supported and inspired. Through her dedicated service and focus on connecting with others, Melissa continues to strengthen Columbus State's culture and the overall student experience.

DR. CRYSTAL HARRIS

Director

Office of Student Accounts & Accounts Receivable

Division of Business & Finance

Dr. Crystal Harris has been a driving force for positive culture since the moment she joined the university. As a leader, she masterfully balances the need for seeking efficiency with a deep commitment to connecting with others. She works tirelessly to ensure the Office of Student Accounts runs smoothly while prioritizing the well-being of her staff and Columbus State students. By implementing new, innovative processes, she has strengthened the university's financial operations and improved the experience for the students and families we serve.

At the heart of Crystal's leadership is her ability to empower others. She builds a cohesive team environment through regular monthly meetings and intentional team-building activities, ensuring that every staff member feels supported and valued. Her focus on building relationships through one-on-one interaction fosters a culture of accountability and mutual respect. Crystal is a dedicated professional who leads with her heart, ensuring that Columbus State's values are reflected in every interaction and process within her office.

LAWANNA HAYES

Senior Executive Assistant

Vice President for Business & Finance

Division of Business & Finance

Lawanna Hayes embodies the spirit of servant leadership through an impact that extends far beyond her job description. Known for her calm professionalism, Lawanna frequently volunteers for the STAT team during the high-pressure start of each semester, ensuring that students and families feel supported and connected to the resources they need. Her commitment to seeking efficiency is evident in her proactive adoption of AI tools to streamline meeting tasks and improve follow-through across the university.

Beyond her technical skills, Lawanna is a dedicated community builder. She serves as a trusted mentor to administrative assistants across campus, offering guidance that empowers her colleagues to succeed. Whether she is ensuring financial compliance or coordinating resources for students in crisis, Lawanna approaches every task with a deep sense of accountability and compassion. She is a vital thread in the fabric of our university culture, making Columbus State stronger through her innovation and teamwork.

CULTURE IN ACTION STAFF AWARDS

JASMINE REID

Academic Advisor, Honors College

Jasmine Reid leads through quiet service and an unwavering focus on lifting others up. Her deep institutional knowledge enables her to connect with colleagues across departments, from Advancement to Student Affairs. Jasmine is a culture champion who practices servant leadership in its purest form, whether she volunteers for the STAT team or mentors peers and students navigating complex academic and personal challenges. She is known for her ability to empower students, particularly those facing personal, medical or mental health hurdles, with patience and encouragement.

Jasmine's dedication to building community often takes her well beyond the office. From personally securing hygiene items for students in crisis to delivering necessary technology resources to out-of-town students on her own time, she embodies our "say it, mean it, do it" philosophy. Jasmine does not seek recognition; instead, she focuses on the tangible impact of her actions. Her commitment to our students' success and her selfless approach to service make her an indispensable member of the Columbus State community.

EXCELLENCE IN ONLINE TEACHING AWARD

DR. BRITTANY GRISSETTE

Assistant Professor
School of Nursing
College of Education & Health Professions

Dr. Brittany Grissette approaches online education not merely as a delivery method, but as an evolving, evidence-based practice. She is recognized for her innovative course designs that bridge the gap between virtual learning and clinical reality. Her signature “unfolding case study” in Health Assessment serves as a prime example, requiring students to apply skills to the same patient throughout a term as new clinical data emerges—mirroring the complexities of real-world nursing practice.

Beyond design, Dr. Grissette demonstrates an extraordinary commitment to student rapport. By routinely analyzing learning outcome data and module feedback, she proactively reshapes her courses to better support adult learners balancing careers and families. Her influence extends to the institutional and system levels, where she chairs the School of Nursing Program Evaluation Committee and serves on the USG eMajor RN-BSN Curriculum Leadership Committee. With a robust scholarly agenda and a 2024 USG eHero Faculty Award, Dr. Grissette exemplifies dedication to high-quality online instruction and student success.

***About the Award:** The Excellence in Online Teaching Award honors faculty members' dedication to high-quality online teaching and learning. Its selection criteria include demonstrating teaching, service and scholarly activities that enhance the quality of online education; employing effective and innovative online teaching practices that lead to student engagement, satisfaction and success in achieving desired learning outcomes; and showing an extraordinary commitment to supporting the academic success of online students by building rapport with individual learners both in and beyond the virtual classroom.*

The winner of this award represents Columbus State as the nominee for the University System of Georgia Regents' Teaching Excellence Award for Online Teaching. Additionally, the winner receives a certificate and a stipend sponsored by the Faculty Center for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning.

FACULTY RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

DR. KATE EARLY

Associate Professor of Exercise Science and Program Coordinator
Department of Kinesiology & Health Sciences
College of Education & Health Professions

Since joining the Columbus State faculty in 2016, Dr. Kate Early has established a prolific and rigorous research agenda spanning cardiovascular health, autonomic physiology and hydration science. Her scholarly work is characterized by its scientific depth and its immediate relevance to both athletes and the community. In 2025 alone, her scholarship reached national audiences through publications in *Scientific Reports* and *Advances in Physiology Education*, the latter of which garnered attention from the National Strength and Conditioning Association.

Dr. Early's research is inherently student-centered; she has mentored numerous students through the complexities of the research process, helping many secure competitive grants for regional and national presentations. Her commitment to community-engaged scholarship is further evidenced by her partnership with local physical therapists on maternal recovery and a large-scale study with Columbus Fire and EMS—one of the largest investigations of its kind. By fostering intellectual growth and connecting the university to the community, Dr. Early embodies the spirit of exceptional faculty scholarship.

***About the Award:** The Faculty Research & Scholarship Award honors exceptional efforts by faculty members in research and scholarship, celebrating the importance of these activities—especially their contribution to faculty intellectual growth. It implicitly acknowledges the role of research and scholarship in enhancing a faculty member's teaching and service capabilities.*

FACULTY SERVICE AWARD

DR. DAVID KIERAN

**Col. Richard R. Hallock Distinguished Chair in Military History
Department of History, Geography & Philosophy
College of Letters & Sciences**

Since his arrival in 2022, Dr. David Kieran has provided transformative service that has woven Columbus State more deeply into the region's civic and military fabric. As the Col. Richard R. Hallock Distinguished University Chair of Military History, he revitalized the Hallock Endowment into a thriving national center for public programming and has positioned Columbus State as a destination for studying and preserving military history. His leadership has secured over \$400,000 in funding to support students' international study experiences in South Korea, archival acquisitions of nationally significant military collections, and high-impact community symposia in partnership with the National Infantry Museum.

Dr. Kieran's service extends beyond the departmental level to national professional leadership. He serves on numerous university committees, as a trustee of the Society for Military History, as a scholar-in-residence at the U.S. Army War College, and as a reviewer for the Cambridge University Press, the University of Chicago Press, Routledge, *Diplomatic History*, and the *Journal of War & Culture Studies*. Through his efforts to establish fully funded internships and to deliver frequent community lectures, Dr. Kieran leverages his primary discipline to create valuable educational and economic initiatives. His work exemplifies the scope and sustained impact the Faculty Service Award was created to honor.

About the Award: The Faculty Service Award recognizes faculty members who provide exceptional professional service to the university, their profession, and the community. Service is defined as contributing expertise from the faculty's primary discipline to valuable university, community, educational, environmental, business and economic initiatives.

SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING & LEARNING AWARD

DR. KRISTIN SEAMON LILLY

**Associate Professor
Department of Mathematics
College of Letters & Sciences**

Dr. Kristin Seamon Lilly is recognized for her sustained and rigorous contributions to evidence-based pedagogy in statistics and data analytics. She operates under a "learning by doing" philosophy, systematically integrating project-based learning across gateway mathematics courses and the Data Analytics program she coordinates. Her scholarly inquiry is rooted in a clear teaching philosophy that seeks to evaluate and improve the impact of classroom practices on student success.

Her dedication to public, peer-reviewed scholarship is evidenced by recent publications in the *Journal of Statistics and Data Science Education* and the *International Journal of Education in Mathematics, Science, and Technology*. Beyond traditional research, Dr. Lilly translates her expertise into meaningful community engagement, exemplified by her development of the RIVR 1101 "Playing with Fire" course that, through the work of her data analytics students, benefited the services provided by Columbus Fire & EMS. She also conducts data literacy workshops for military audiences at Fort Benning and Fort Cavazos. Her work demonstrates how thoughtful scholarship of teaching and learning research can simultaneously inform curriculum design and enrich the broader community.

About the Award: The Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Award recognizes faculty members who enhance the understanding of teaching and learning through scholarly inquiry. It celebrates faculty who utilize strategies for investigating and evaluating the impact of teaching practices on student learning, rooted in research literature; engage in public, peer-reviewed scholarship that invites critique; produce scholarly work that generates new questions and knowledge about

FACULTY EXCELLENCE AWARDS

teaching and learning; develop a clearly defined teaching philosophy that informs research questions; and document the dissemination of their scholarly results.

The winner of this award represents Columbus State as the nominee for the University System of Georgia Regents' Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Award. Additionally, the winner receives a certificate and a stipend sponsored by the Faculty Center for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning.

TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD

DR. YESEM KURT PEKER

**Interim Director of the Graduate School and
Professor, TSYS School of Computer Science**

D. Abbott Turner College of Business & Technology

Over her 13-year tenure at Columbus State, Dr. Yeşem Kurt Peker has demonstrated that teaching is more than a profession—it is a passion. She is celebrated for creating a classroom environment that balances high-level challenges with unwavering support. Her pedagogy integrates growth-mindset principles and transparent design, ensuring that students bridge the gap between theoretical computer science and real-world cybersecurity practice.

Dr. Peker's commitment to academic success extends far beyond the virtual and physical classroom. Through her leadership in the INSuRE research program and her mentorship in national cybersecurity competitions, her students have secured prestigious scholarships, first-place awards and conference publications. Described by colleagues as a mentor who "never gives up on anyone," she fosters problem-solving skills and critical thinking in every learner. Her dedication to student growth and her innovative use of technology represent teaching excellence at Columbus State.

***About the Award:** The Teaching Excellence Award honors faculty committed to teaching, student success and innovative instructional practices. It celebrates faculty for utilizing classroom activities designed to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as global and multicultural understanding; employing effective teaching strategies to enhance student learning, such as innovative uses of technology, active learning, learning communities, student portfolios and assessments; and fostering academic success through interactions with students outside the classroom (e.g., advising, mentoring, recruiting, etc.).*

The winner of this award represents Columbus State as the nominee for the University System of Georgia Regents' Teaching Excellence Award. Additionally, the winner receives a medallion and a stipend sponsored by the Faculty Center for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning.

TEACHING INNOVATION AWARD

DR. WEN SHI

Associate Professor

Department of Accounting & Finance

D. Abbott Turner College of Business & Technology

Dr. Wen Shi approaches the classroom with an innovator's mindset, continuously refining students' learning experiences to meet the evolving demands of the labor market. She seamlessly integrates career-readiness into her macroeconomics and MBA courses, connecting abstract economic concepts to the real-world decisions students face about employment and the future of work. Her teaching is marked by creative methodologies that drive students' interest and achievement.

Among her many innovations are data-driven State Economy Analysis projects and "giant Post-it" peer learning exhibitions that encourage active collaboration. She also employs a growth-mindset grading policy paired with post-exam reflection to improve learning outcomes. By integrating global perspectives throughout the CSU International Learning Community, Dr. Shi ensures her students gain a multicultural understanding

FACULTY EXCELLENCE AWARDS

of the modern economy. A two-time Turner College Teaching Award winner, Dr. Shi exemplifies the creative spirit and commitment to pedagogical improvement that this award honors.

***About the Award:** The Teaching Innovation Award recognizes faculty members who implement novel teaching methods that enhance student learning and engagement by developing and practicing innovative pedagogical methodologies. It highlights creative faculty innovations that promote improved learning—specifically regarding unique “program actions” that increase student interest and drive achievement.*

CREATIVE ENDEAVORS AWARD

NATALIA TEMESGEN

**Associate Professor
Department of English
College of Letters & Sciences**

Natalia Naman Temesgen is a playwright, screenwriter and educator whose work represents a powerful convergence of national achievement and local impact. Building on her successful television writing career for platforms such as Hulu, HBO Max and Netflix, her 2025 creative output reached new heights. She is currently developing *Tagged*, an original true-crime limited series, while her screenplay *Our E.Z. of Melville*—a story deeply rooted in the local region—advanced to the final round of the prestigious Sundance Institute Screenwriting Lab.

Despite her national reach, Professor Temesgen remains profoundly connected to the Columbus community. Her theatrical work continues to receive regional premieres, and her contributions to the arts were recently recognized with the 2025 Kim Porter Legacy Award from Columbus’ *Courier Eco Latino*. Whether serving as program chair for Leadership Georgia’s Class of 2025 or mentoring students in our Department of English, she demonstrates how creative excellence can elevate both a professional discipline and the community it serves. Her work stands as a testament to the vital role of the arts at Columbus State.

***About the Award:** The Faculty Creative Endeavors Award recognizes faculty members for their significant contributions to creative expression within their discipline, resulting in exemplary tangible products such as publications, performances and artworks. The award celebrates the impact of these creative activities on the intellectual and artistic growth of students and faculty, prioritizing those whose work aligns with their discipline’s standards of excellence.*

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

DR. BOBBY NIXON

**Associate Professor and Honors College Faculty Fellow
Department of Society, Culture & Languages
College of Letters & Sciences**

Dr. Bobby Nixon has been a driving force in campus internationalization, providing Columbus State students with transformative global learning experiences for over a decade. Since 2017, Dr. Nixon has led an annual immersive Spanish program in Spain, where students live with host families and engage in experiential cultural learning. This program, developed in collaboration with our host institution partner CLIC, has become a cornerstone of the university’s study abroad offerings, directly contributing to student progression and graduation.

On campus, Dr. Nixon’s influence is equally significant. He has developed specialized RIVR courses and International Learning Community curricula that bring global perspectives into the classroom for students at all levels. His service on the International Education and Study Abroad Proposal committees and his role as faculty sponsor for the Sigma Delta Pi Spanish Honors Society further illustrate his dedication to a globalized

FACULTY EXCELLENCE AWARDS

campus culture. Through his leadership and advocacy, Dr. Nixon has ensured that international education remains an accessible and vital part of the Columbus State experience.

***About the Award:** The International Educator of the Year Award honors faculty or staff members who have significantly contributed to campus internationalization and global student learning.*

CHAPPELL GRADUATE AWARD

DR. CHARLES BOSTER

Assistant Professor

Department of Accounting & Finance

D. Abbott Turner College of Business & Technology

Since joining the Turner College of Business & Technology in 2022, Dr. Charles Boster has distinguished himself through a profound commitment to graduate student success. In his managerial accounting courses, Dr. Boster has moved away from traditional lecture formats in favor of a team-oriented, project-driven approach. His teaching philosophy—a blend of humanist and constructivist principles—mirrors the real-world business decision-making students will encounter in their professional careers.

Dr. Boster utilizes high-impact practices, including writing-intensive assignments and capstone business proposals, to ensure students master complex analytical concepts. His dedication to iterative feedback and continuous improvement has led to consistently high student evaluations and exceptional retention among his MBA cohorts. Students frequently describe his courses as among the most valuable in their program, with lessons they can apply immediately to their own businesses. In the tradition of Dr. William Chappell, Dr. Boster exemplifies excellence in graduate teaching and service to the university community.

***About the Award:** The Chappell Graduate Faculty Award honors full-time graduate faculty who, following the tradition established by Dr. William "Bill" Chappell, demonstrate excellence in graduate teaching and service to students, the university and the community. Chappell passed away in 2011 after serving 34 years on the university faculty.*



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