

Faculty members honored for transformative influence in student lives

BY: ZACHARY BOEHM | PUBLISHED: DECEMBER 1, 2016 | 3:10 PM | SHARE: [f](#) [t](#) [k](#) [e](#)

Fourteen Florida State University faculty members have been honored by the Transformation Through Teaching program for their transformative influence in the lives of their students inside and outside of the classroom.

The Transformation Through Teaching program is an initiative established by FSU's Spiritual Life Project, which seeks to foster integrative relationships that provide support for students in their lifelong search for meaning and self-realization.

The Transformation Through Teaching awards recognize faculty members whose contributions in the lives of their students go beyond conventional academic instruction. Honorees are nominated by their students for their dedication to helping students find their authentic selves and pursue their dreams.

The awards were conferred Nov. 28 during a ceremony at the President's house.

"The faculty here tonight are not only teachers and researchers, they are mentors, role models and cheerleaders," President John Thrasher said. "They offer advice and encouragement, and they push their students to reach higher."





Edward Hansen and Emilee Cruz



Whitney Bendeck and Nikolai Hernandez



Heather Boni and Ilana Goldman



Sven Kranz and Yuliya Danyuk



Shannon Riess and Rob McDaniel



Shelby Hobbs and Patrick Merle



Michael Nair-Collins and Samantha Mahon



Kelly Ramirez and John Ribó



Robert Romanchuk and Thuy-Linh Pham



Robert Schwartz and Sally Watkins



Will Boose (stepping in for Rachel Crooks) and Robinson Herrera

The 2016 Transformation Through Teaching Award winners are:

Deborah Ebener, associate professor and coordinator of counselor education, was nominated by Kara Dingess for her abiding support during a time of hospitalization.

“All the FSU faculty members that I have had contact with have all be truly wonderful. My experience with Dr. Ebener is different in that she went out of her way to check on me every day, as well as letting all of the other faculty members know what was going on. Knowing that I had her on my side, allowed me to relax and concentrate on getting myself better.” — Kara Dingess

Edward Hansen, assistant teaching professor of psychology, was nominated by Emilee Cruz for his innovative and engaging approaches to teaching.

“As a student studying psychology and education, I am very much fascinated in psychological study and research that is taught effectively. Dr. Hansen has an engaging grasp and take on pedagogy whether it’s implementing creative techniques or having open, relevant, valuable discussions. Hansen has married both psychology and education beautifully (in a way) that makes me admire his teaching techniques and knowledge of psychology that appeals to both of my areas of study.” — Emilee Cruz

Ilana Goldman, associate professor of dance, was nominated for her unwavering encouragement of student Heather Boni as she worked towards her research goals.

“From the very moment I entered the MFA degree program as a first-year graduate student in Dance, Ilana Goldman, a professor of dance, believed and trusted in my potential and ability to further develop my

research initiative in integrated dance practice and to inspire change and action. Ilana has served as my guiding mentor for almost three years and has remained my constant, steadfast reminder that people want to be a part of something that matters, something of value, something meaningful.” — Heather Boni

Michael Nair-Collins, assistant professor of behavioral science and social medicine, was selected by Samantha Mahon for helping to spark her passion for bioethics.

“Not only has Dr. Nair-Collins’ mentorship made me realize my passion for bioethics, he has also helped me grow as an individual. Dr. Nair-Collins makes me want to be a better person, a better student and a better future physician. He embodies bioethics in every way, looking out for others, especially those who don’t have a voice; minimizing harm, which is as simple to him as being kind; being open-minded to others, so he can truly listen to every perspective.” — Samantha Mahon

John Ribó, assistant professor of English, was nominated by Kelly Ramirez for helping her make connections between her coursework and her service interests.

“Dr. Ribó’s teaching method is undeniably different from the traditional relationship that professors have with their students, which often does not go beyond a lecture and a letter grade. What has proven significant to my experience is his initiative in discussing my service program, which is not required of him. At a moment of uncertainty, he was able to provide guidance and reassurance in the midst of a project that has developed into a labor of love. His support and willingness to help is unlike that of any other professor I have ever had.” — Kelly Ramirez

Patrick Merle, assistant professor of public relations, was selected by Shelby Hobbs for instilling in her a motivation to continue her education.

“It is difficult for me to describe my wonderful experience in graduate school at FSU in so few words. Even as a young professional, I can already tell this was one the best decisions of my life that I never would have considered without Dr. Merle’s advice. Dr. Merle helped me understand the concrete benefits of graduate school, as well as the not so concrete benefits.” — Shelby Hobbs

Rob McDaniel, faculty researcher and senior fellow at FSU’s Center for Disaster Risk Policy, was nominated for his work facilitating career opportunities for student Shannon Riess.

“Rob helped me realize not only what I wanted out of life, but what kind of person I am and what I could become if I maximized my full potential. In my time with him I learned so much about emergency management, was able to make connections of a lifetime, secure a full time job (I do not even have my degree yet as it is currently my senior year) and mostly I was able to learn so much about myself and how my mission to help others can be transformed into a lifelong career.” — Shannon Riess

Robert Romanchuk, associate professor of Slavic and associate chair of undergraduate studies in the Department of Modern Languages and

Linguistics, was nominated by Thuy-Linh Pham for helping her achieve extraordinary success as an undergraduate researcher.

“As I prepare myself to graduate from Florida State University, I would attribute my experiences with Dr. Romanchuk as the very reasons that I am leaving with more than just a degree. The lifelong skills and instruction that I obtained from Dr. Romanchuk have enriched my academic development so much that he led me to pursue my own independent research project.” — Thuy-Linh Pham

Robert Schwartz, professor of educational leadership and policy studies, was selected by Sally Watkins for providing guidance during the difficult process of composing a doctoral dissertation.

“Deciding on a dissertation topic, for me, was a challenging process. As an individual often distracted by “shiny things”, I regularly waffled on the subject and directions. Dr. Schwartz embraced my approach and engaged me in conversation to clarify and refine my topic as well as reflect on my plans following graduation.” — Sally Watkins

Robinson Herrera, associate professor of history, was nominated by Rachel Crooks for his presence as a trusted source of support and encouragement during a difficult time.

“No other professor has gone above and beyond to assist a student in need, whether it was academically or personally. I still fondly remember the intellectual conversations we had in class or during office hours, and our continued correspondence about legal issues in Latin America. He continues to be my source for advice before big interviews or writing any papers for publications and he has also become a source of inspiration and celebration for my academic and personal achievements.” — Rachel Crooks

Sven Kranz, assistant professor in the Department of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Science, was selected by Yuliya Danyuk for helping her to develop a spirit of curiosity and creativity.

“Whenever you hear of undergraduates working in a lab, you usually hear of them doing demeaning working that involves doing dishes or making sure that things look neat. The second I met Dr. Kranz he wanted to know what I was interested in and let me design my own experiment with his guidance and let me gather real data from it, rather than making me fall back on something he was doing. While he demanded a lot of work from me, everything I have done was very beneficial to my future.” — Yuliya Danyuk

Whitney Bendeck, assistant professor of international affairs, was selected by Nikolai Hernandez for her commitment to challenging him to work always in the service of others.

“Dr. Bendeck helped me realize the deep empathy that lies within in me. She helped us all see the things in ourselves and each other that make us human. It is here that she helped me realize that dedicating myself to

the service of others, even in the smallest of ways, has the power to change the course of peoples' entire lives."—Nikolai Hernandez

Theresa Van Lith, assistant professor of art therapy, was selected by Lindsay Bullock for her steadfast dedication to providing her students with opportunities to grow.

"Dr. Van Lith has a commitment to her students as a clinical coordinator. She goes above and beyond to ensure placements are fitting, and the students will have a great experience at the site. She offers her time to meet with students individually to gain understanding of their perspectives and desires out of the practicum experience, so she can better cater to their needs." — Lindsay Bullock

Mahsheed Khajavi, assistant professor of clinical medicine, was nominated by Alexandra Lackey for going out of her way to help motivate and teach students.

"It's easy to forget that our purpose in medical school is to dedicate ourselves to the service of others, but Dr. Khajavi always brings our focus back to eventually being able to touch others' lives. She gets to know her students on a personal level, and always generously spends extra time to make sure we are doing okay both academically and personally. FSU COM is all about treating patients using a biopsychosocial model, and Dr. Khajavi treats us with the love and compassion we hope to be able to give our future patients." — Alexandra Lackey