

**School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences**  
*Outstanding Teaching Comet Awards*  
**2013-2014**



*April 30, 2014*

# *Winners*

## **Criminology**

- **Elmer Polk**

## **Economics**

- **Tammy Leonard**
- **Lloyd Dumas**

## **Geospatial Information Sciences**

- **Anthony Cummings**
- **Fang Qiu**
- **Michael Tiefelsdorf**

## **Political Science**

- **Brandon Kinne**

## **Public Affairs**

- **Donald Arbuckle**

## **Public Policy and Political Economy**

- **Dohyeong Kim**
- **Rubia Valente**

## **Sociology**

- **Sheryl Skaggs**

# *Criminology*

## **J.C. Barnes**

Dr. Barnes is one of the nicest people that I know. He is always fair and he will go out of his way to help students. I know that UTD has a lot of wonderful professors, but I think that Dr. Barnes is the best.

- Traci Hoffman

## **Alex Piquero**

Great passion for teaching; great connection with students; amazing depth of knowledge of the field.

- Elena Garrett

## **Elmer Polk**

Dr. Polk will do anything he can to help a student. He is an amazing teacher and is very informative.

- Staci Taylor

Dr. Polk has been an inspirational figure to me since I began in the criminology program last fall. As an instructor, he is more than capable. He has experience in the field, he can relate to students extraordinarily well, and above all he is a man that's passionate about teaching. Out of respect, I have found myself going to Dr. Polk for advice on beginning my career as well as with personal issues. I am nominating Dr. Polk for the Comet Award because I feel like his passion in criminal justice rubs off on students and at least has motivated me to further my studies even on subjects that aren't directly related to the field, but are often practical in real life.

- Steve Shen

Makes class fun and engaging, learned so much and has inspired me to get my doctorate.

- Erin Samples

Professor Polk is incredible. He is selfless and inspiring. He has relatable stories to his course subject. His assignments are not easy but he makes sure to assist anyone who needs it. He isn't too prideful to admit if he is wrong and he promotes discussion. It helps that he is funny. 😊

- Mary Thorp

# *Economics*

## **Tammy Leonard**

Dr. Leonard is an extraordinary teacher for many reasons. Her grasp of the field of economics and dedication to teaching the subject to her students makes her classes some of the most rewarding and enriching learning experiences in the school. I have had the pleasure of taking two graduate courses with Dr. Leonard in past semesters - Applied Macroeconomics and Applied Econometrics. I regularly refer to my lecture notes in these courses because of the clarity in which the concepts were taught. This semester, I am fortunate to work under her supervision in my Independent Study. The guidance she provides is also as helpful as her courses in furthering my understanding of economics. Despite her very busy schedule, she makes herself available whenever I am stumped and need additional advice to solve a problem.

Dr. Leonard encourages her students to seek help from her by stressing that "no question is a dumb question." I recommend her courses to any student in the economics department because her teaching is not only clear, but inspiring, in preparation for further education and a career in economics.

- Basel Bataineh

## **Lloyd Dumas**

Dr. Dumas is the professor who inspired me to apply to graduate school and to become a professor. Without his classes, I would never have found the motivation and interest in economics that has driven me to succeed in my academics.

- Anonymous

# *Geospatial Information Sciences*

## **Bryan Chastain**

His class is well organized, the lectures and lab instructions are conveyed clearly, and his grading is fair. He is so patient to help students who have trouble with programming in class. Although the class is so packed with about 34 students, I'm impressed that he still provides thorough feedback to every one of us for our final projects. Such a dedicated teacher! I really enjoyed taking his class.

- Vini Indriasari

## **Anthony Cummings**

I have known Dr. Cummings since Fall 2013 when I took his Global Environment course. Starting that semester and continuing in Spring 2014, I regularly visited with Dr. Cummings who empowered me with a multitude of resources and helped engage me in many opportunities. I continue to work closely with Dr. Cummings, as we are working together to co-author a paper on Guyana political responses to the UN REDD movement.

Dr. Cummings is empowering. During one of our discussions, I mentioned a book I read in high school pertaining to our area of interest. When talking with him a semester later, I found the book on his bookshelf and he told me how insightful it was. This was empowering and made me feel like a valued scholar as I had something to share and bring to the table. Dr. Cummings has also helped bring various internship opportunities to my attention, supported me in the application process and followed up by asking about the results. Recently, he offered me the opportunity to co-author a paper with him. He has also lent me books before.

Dr. Cummings fosters a sense of community, trust and respect through open communication with all of his students. Dr. Cummings shows his support for students by making his time available to students (both on an individual basis and in the classroom), checking on student progress in and out of the classroom as well as meeting with fellow students who are interested in working with him. He has a genuine interest in helping students benefit and interact with faculty as he has offered various opportunities within my Global Environment class to come on trips to study atoll reefs which many students have expressed an interest in.

Dr. Cummings has been an integral part of my experience at UT Dallas and has been important to that of my peers. Dr. Cummings would be an outstanding recipient of the Comet Award.

- Sarah Kazuko Martin

Dr. Cummings is an experienced teacher, with erudite knowledge about geography and deep research in the GIS field.

- Jiaxu Fang

### **Daniel Griffith**

I want to nominate him because of his very energetic and very flexible approach he uses to teach such a tough class. The effort he put in preparing his class slides is admirable. He gives opportunities to every student to turn his bad submission into a good one.

- Parmanand Sinha

### **Fang Qiu**

Excellent teaching skills with plenty of practical experiences included within labs.

- Fan Shi

Dr. Qiu is a very nice professor. As an advisor, he teaches me not only how to do research, but also how to read papers, take notes, write a research paper, and even how to practice my English, which is invaluable. I have learned a lot from him.

- Yuhong Zhou

### **Michael Tiefelsdorf**

Let me start with the fact that Dr. T is charged with teaching students one of the most difficult subjects to understand at a theoretical level – statistics. Besides being incredibly knowledgeable about the required subject matter, Dr. T is very understanding of his students and extremely accommodating when it comes to ensuring their success in his class. More specifically, I was inspired by Dr. T after how he continuously treated me during a very difficult period of time last year. With two weeks left in the fall semester, I became so sick that I couldn't get out of bed – finishing the semester was not an option. I had completed the required amount of coursework according to University policy, so it was no surprise that he granted me an “incomplete” grade. When I came back in the spring, he was very committed to getting me prepared for the final exam that I missed. We met often. He provided me with lecture materials from the class (I no longer had Blackboard access), and he even offered to re-lecture full lessons in case I needed the review. Dr. T goes above and beyond for the students in this school. He often goes unnoticed because he teaches an unpopular subject. He is a humble man as well; he would never expect recognition like a Comet Award, but he is more than deserving.

- Alycia Rajendran

In the past two years, Dr. T (as many endearingly refer to him) has shown exemplary efforts in continuing education. Although he is swamped by teaching 3 courses this semester, he has always made time to meet with me regarding my Master's project and I believe he has had

more sleepless nights regarding the success of his advisees than I had over my own project! – HAHA His determination to have everyone succeed in his course material is unmistakable, from his endless efforts to be available for help to his acknowledgement at times of deficiencies in how his course material was received. I cannot think of a more deserving individual of this award and for him to know that he is appreciated for his efforts that go above and beyond. His empathy towards me, as well as my fellow classmates in times of personal turmoil make him stand out as one of only a couple of professors I have had in my time as an undergraduate/graduate (2008-present) student at UT Dallas.

- Leah Bowyer

## *Political Science*

### **Brian Bearry**

He truly cares about his students and allows for freedom of thought to be applied to the class material. He is a true political science teacher.

- Sarah Brown

### **Brandon Kinne**

Dr. Kinne vividly explains the subject in a clear and thorough manner. His passion for international relations is shown through class discussions and participation. He presents the lectures in an articulate manner.

- Sheereen Ibtesam

Knowledgeable, high quality teaching and inspiring.

- Omar Al-Maskari

### **Banks Miller**

Dr. Miller is very informative and honest about facts in the legal system. He is also an inspiration to many students.

- Zain Mohammad

### **Clint Peinhardt**

Great professor!

- Daniel N.



## *Public Affairs*

### **Donald Arbuckle**

'To teach is to touch a life forever.' Dr. Arbuckle has excelled in achieving this mission. I wish I could stay his student for the rest of my life.

- Anonymous

Dr. Arbuckle is an inspiration in the classroom. His passion for teaching really shows and learning about Public Policy from him is fun! His subject matter expertise is a great asset to the University and to his students. He challenges students to perform their best work by helping them to improve their writing skills. His participation in the Archer Center Graduate Program in Public Policy really helped me get the most out of my Washington, DC experience. Dr. Arbuckle makes UTD a better place to learn!

- Laura Gorecki

### **Sarah Maxwell**

Dr. Maxwell is a great teacher and mentor. Her class assignments are never just the typical research papers required for most classes and the projects give students valuable experience and knowledge they can apply in their careers later on. She takes an interest in her students beyond the classroom too. She has spent a great deal of time with me discussing my goals, helping me set strategies for reaching them, and giving me the resources to do so. I would not have joined the MPA program if not for Dr. Maxwell. She has truly changed my life for the better!

- Laura Gorecki

### **John McCaskill**

Dr. McCaskill has been an excellent professor and has offered plenty of knowledge and personal experiences to his students. I have taken both his Public Management and Organizational Theory courses and I look forward to seeing what other courses I am able to take with him next semester. His teaching skills and patience has truly strengthened me as a student of this university. He has been an inspirational figure to me and has been a great role model. I understand that he works in the administration building throughout the day and teaches in the evenings, which can be a handful. When I approached him and asked him to write a letter of recommendation on my behalf for the Archer Program, he was more than happy to do so. To me this was something I will appreciate for a lifetime. Dr. John McCaskill is

truly a perfect and positive asset to the University of Texas at Dallas and I feel like he deserves recognition for all he does.

- Jennifer Colunga

# *Public Policy and Political Economy*

## **Jonas Bunte**

For a class structure of guided group discussion with 18 graduate students, Dr. Bunte has demonstrated great teaching skill. Not only do 18 graduates have different interests, they also have different educational backgrounds. How to cover new material and guide so many graduate students in discussions without descending into either pedagogical apathy or class anarchy is the question that Dr. Bunte addresses every class with expertise.

To say that I learned more about Political Economic Theory is easily agreed with. To say that I have also seen teaching excellence demonstrated weekly is both remarkable and impressive. So remarkable, it needs to be recognized with this Comet Award. Impressive, I can learn from this experience to apply in my future teaching endeavors.

Perhaps the highest form of recognition for Dr. Bunte is that he be encouraged to teach this class again!

- Will Grover

Dr. Bunte deserves recognition mainly for how he structured his class. Given that his course was a seminar, he did an excellent job of encouraging conversation, and as the semester progressed, he improved in establishing a more egalitarian discussion i.e. preventing the more outspoken members of class from dominating the conversation, thereby allowing the more reserved students to contribute.

Dr. Bunte was also outstanding at clarifying advanced economic concepts in a manner that could be easily digested by a novice, and also at applying them to real-world situations. He did this by assigning groups at the end of class and having them grapple with concocted economic scenarios using the concepts discussed in class that day. In short, he made the theories extend beyond the bubble of academia.

Finally, on a personal note, I was impressed by Dr. Bunte's accessibility outside of class and the professional knowledge he used to advise me on my career path. His counsel was sober and practical, and has helped refine my ambitions. Additionally, whenever he assessed my work for his class, he was very balanced in his feedback, offering praise when merited, and constructive in his criticism. For these reasons, I strongly recommend Dr. Jonas Bunte for the Outstanding Teaching Comet Award.

- David Sobczak

Dr. Bunte inspired our entire class to think critically. His enthusiasm for the subject matter was contagious. He made it clear that he was always available outside of class to help us, both academically and personally. His focus on preparing us for the workplace was so helpful and inspiring. He is the best professor I have had here at UTD. Even though I am no longer in his class, he has been more than willing to help me prepare for life after graduation. I am thrilled he has joined the UTD faculty. He has inspired me to focus on research of developing countries. He deserves this award!

- Cassandra Heck

I am nominating Dr. Jonas Bunte for the Comet Award because he is one of the best professors I have encountered while studying International Political Economy. I am now a senior graduating in May, and I have to say that out of all of the classes I had to take for the major, I found Dr. Bunte's class is by far the most beneficial to me. I could use and apply the knowledge and skills I've acquired in his class in my other classes. This class made many other concepts previously learned (but not entirely understood) much more clearly.

Dr. Bunte has an exceptional ability and patience to explain concepts and ideas. He makes sure that every student understands the class material. He uses teaching methods that engage and involve all of the students in the class. He leaves plenty of time for discussion, and he allows students to lead the class. He does not simply lecture and present the material, but instead he allows students to actively participate in the learning process.

Dr. Bunte clearly defines the class objectives and his short lectures are engaging and thought-provoking. The group exercises have taught me how to work efficiently in groups and allowed me to apply the assigned reading to different scenarios.

Dr. Bunte is extremely well-versed and prepared in his subject, and he has an outstanding ability to communicate with students. I wish I had the chance to take more classes with him. Many professors teach, but only a few educate. Dr. Bunte is one of those few, and I honored to call myself one of his former students.

- Reka Kovacs

## **Jennifer Holmes**

Dr. Holmes is the definition of the consummate professional. She brings to the classroom a breadth of knowledge one would expect of someone twice her age. Dr. Holmes is witty and passionate about the subject(s) she teaches. She wants each of her students to succeed, despite themselves, and her impact on my life personally and in the class has proven invaluable. When I had given up on myself, she refused to let me give up.

- Terrell Phillips

## **Dohyeong Kim**

Dr. Kim was always well-prepared for his class and he explained difficult statistical concepts with examples very well. I am inspired by his passion regarding teaching and consideration for students. When I went to his office hours, he spent his time to fully support me.

- Kwang Bin Bae

I think Dr. Kim should receive this award because he is a good professor and you can tell that he genuinely cares about students. His lectures were very thorough and he worked through many examples so we could follow along and understand. Even though there was a lot of material to cover, he never rushed through it; he always took time to carefully explain the material so the students could grasp key concepts. He genuinely wanted all of us to be successful in his class and it showed in the way that he taught. Also, he is very accessible; he always responded promptly to emails and encouraged us to ask questions. Whenever I had questions, I asked Dr. Kim and always came away with a better understanding.

- Patricia Chen

Making every effort to help students get knowledge from class and is well-prepared for the assignments and exams.

- Yi-En Tso

We think Dr. Kim is a great teacher who inspired us by showing what kind of teacher is a good one in a student's perspective. We took EPPS 7313 in Fall 2013 and it could have been a boring class in terms of its nature but he prepared teaching material thoroughly every week and tried to make the class fun as much as possible. He made his teaching very clear and not difficult to understand by giving us lots of examples and showing us problem-solving processes on the white board step-by-step. Also, he always welcomed and encouraged any questions so that students didn't have to lose confidence. And making himself available outside of the classroom often was very helpful. It was pretty clear that Dr. Kim wanted to be helpful to students so that we could learn as much as possible from his class. On top of that, using his own research to the relevant topics was creative and intriguing even though the nature of the EPPS 7313 class didn't seem to allow many opportunities to do so. It was inspiring to see that a statistics class could be interesting. Dr. Kim made great efforts to meet students' needs in many ways so we nominate him for the Outstanding Teaching Comet Award.

- Soojin Min and Pham Thi  
Cam Anh

Dr. Kim is not only a scholar, but also a caring and dedicated educator. He goes the extra mile to be available to his students in and out of class and always has their best interests. He

challenges his students, but also rewards effort and hard work. It is evident that Dr. Kim makes his teaching and his students a top priority.

- Sayeeda Jamilah

## **Rubia Valente**

Dr. Valente is an amazing teacher that went above and beyond for her students. She was able to help me see world issues from an entirely different perspective. Not only did she keep her course content interesting and relevant, but she was also very open to helping students outside of the classroom in any way she could. Her class helped shape my personal career goals and inspired me to take several different initiatives such as starting a women's political activism club on campus.

- Aysa Khan

Rubia Valente is an amazing teacher and person. She is so passionate about teaching and she works in a way that makes the student more enthusiastic about learning. Just loved her class. She was one of the best teachers I had while attending school in the U.S.

- Khadija Morchid

Rubia Valente has incredible skills to interact with her students. She truly cares about each and every one of them, and is always available for consultation outside of class too. She makes sure she learns the names of all the students. Dr. Valente always gives timely feedback on papers and exams. She makes notes on graded papers to ensure that students learn from their mistakes. Her grading is fair, and she gives students the opportunity to do their best through numerous assignments. She also praises students, which in my opinion, is the single greatest motivator.

Dr. Valente has an engaging personality. She is very enthusiastic about her subject and knows how to communicate it effectively. She uses a variety of teaching tools, such as interactive maps and graphs, short clips, and movies in order to engage students and help them to get a better understanding of the subject matter. She makes sure to include all students in class discussions and creates such a positive atmosphere in the classroom that even the most timid students feel comfortable participating. The skills and knowledge I have gained by taking Prof. Valente's class are extremely valuable. I have been able to use both in my other classes and outside of school.

Dr. Valente has inspired me to do my best. She is truly the best and I am honored to have learned from her.

- Reka Kovacs

A great class (ISSS 3349 World Resources and Development) to be a part of. She is extremely helpful all the time.

- Muhammad Usman

Absolutely great professor! She has an amazing way of sharing her knowledge and motivating students to do their best. Always available for consultations. Makes sure you leave with all your questions fully answered.

- Gabriela Ivan

Dr. Valente is a great instructor! Her teaching is very interactive and has a lasting impact on any student. Personally, her class inspired me to pursue human trafficking post-law school. It was because of her class alone that I am certain about what I want to do with my degree and future. I recommend her with no reservations. She is a great instructor and UTD is lucky to have her!

- Ninna Drouillard-Salom

This professor was truly an inspiration to me. All her lessons were interesting and you could tell that she was passionate and extensively knowledgeable about what she was talking about. I had the privilege of talking with her one-on-one and she motivated me to pursue a career that I found personally satisfying and rewarding with regards to country development and education.

- Marlene Campos

Simply put, Dr. Valente is an excellent professor. It was not only her enthusiasm that encouraged me to attend to class every day. It was also her knowledge and didactical approach that made this class, by far, one of my favorite classes of the entire curriculum. Dr. Valente was friendly yet firm. She pushed me to always give the best of me for she believed in my ideas (and whenever she did not believe in them, she expressed her opinion yet never pushed me to follow her point of view).

Outside of class, Dr. Valente was always polite and open to listening to any problems I might have. She also demonstrated her care towards her students by taking considerable time to find out about your goals in life, and was always willing to help if she could do something to help you achieve them.

Indeed, it impressed me when I asked her for recommendation letter, she did not hesitate to do so. She also asked me for my resume and for any other relevant information that would make her recommendation letter more than the regular template letters certain professors give. Again, Dr. Valente is the best!

- Raily Ricon

I am extremely appreciative of all the help and support I received from Dr. Rubia Valente as an educator and professor. While I was in her class, she was always there to answer questions and showed sincere concern in all her students' work and any problems we had. Her classes were

always interesting and interactive. ISSS 3349 was one of the classes I looked forward to attending that semester due to her teaching style.

- Tasfia Rouf



# *Sociology*

## **Nicholas Vargas**

Dr. Vargas is a Sociology professor who makes learning about tough issues such as racism and inequality comfortable (for a lack of a better word). He encourages all of his students to speak honestly and ignites hope in the heart of all of his students who inspire to make a difference in the world. Dr. Vargas is actively involved in assisting students obtain internships and careers in the field of sociology. He's approachable, funny, and makes sociology club meetings both entertaining, thought-provoking and memorable.

- Danica Jones-Taylor

## **Sheryl Skaggs**

Dr. Skaggs has a very nice teaching style which is non-judgmental and strives to include everyone in on the conversation. I have also found her to be very organized as an instructor and head of the Public Affairs and Sociology programs. She is a great role model for females too.

- Julie Haworth

While I took an independent study under the guidance of Dr. Skaggs, I learned a lot on how to analyze a research topic and organize a paper. Although I could learn a specific topic and subject in a class taught by another professor, the independent study with her was so helpful for me to learn from her know-how regarding research and writing.

- Kwang Bin Bae

Thank you to the EPPS faculty for  
all their hard work and dedication  
to the students of UT Dallas.



