



MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY BILLINGS

1500 University Drive
Billings, MT 59101

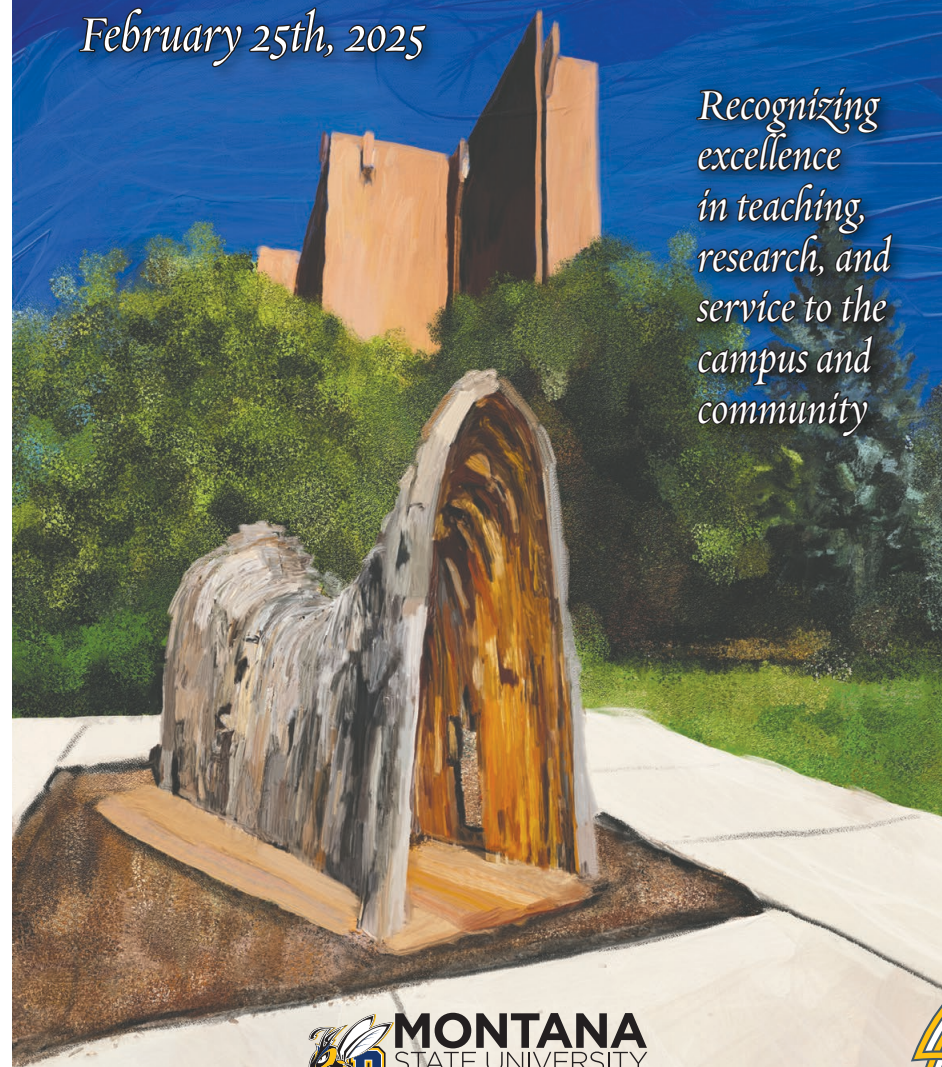
www.msubillings.edu · www.msubsports.com

MSU Billings is an Equal Opportunity Employer/Affirmative Action/ADA Institution

Faculty EXCELLENCE

February 25th, 2025

*Recognizing
excellence
in teaching,
research, and
service to the
campus and
community*



YEARS OF SERVICE RECOGNITION

5 YEARS

Dr. Robin Heigis-Cormier

Assistant Professor, Educational Theory and Practice, COE

Dr. Rachael De La Cruz

Assistant Professor, History, CLASS

Mr. Alan Lohof

Program Director/Instructor, Nursing, Health and Public Safety, CC

Robin Rasmussen, M.S.

Instructor, Nursing, Health and Public Safety, CC

10 YEARS

Dr. Kari Dahle-Huff

Associate Professor, Educational Theory and Practice, COE

Dr. Sougata Das

Associate Professor, Business Administration, COB

Lynn George, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Biological and Physical Sciences, CHPS

Dr. Mara Pierce

Associate Professor, Art, CLASS

Alex Shafer, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Health Sciences and Human Performance, CHPS

Dr. Heather Thompson-Bahm

Assistant Professor, Business Administration, COB

15 YEARS

Dr. Anna Talafuse

Associate Professor, Business Administration, COB

20 YEARS

Eric Gilbertsen

Instructor, General Education, CC

25 YEARS

Dr. Rakesh Sah

Professor, Business Administration, COB

35 YEARS

Dr. Susan P. Gregory

Professor, Educational Theory and Practice, COE

Melinda C. Tilton

Lecturer, Communication & Theatre, CLASS

ACHIEVING TENURE

Curtis Leibrand

Instructor, Nursing, Health and Public Safety, CC

Dr. Paula L. McMahon

Dept. Chair; Associate Professor, Rehabilitation and Human Services, CHPS

John Pannell

Instructor, Computer Systems Technology, CC

Keara J. Rhoades

Assistant Professor, Art, CLASS

Dr. Anna Talafuse

Associate Professor, Business Administration, COB

Dr. Mel Sullivan-Walker

Associate Professor, Educational Theory and Practice, COE

Christine Whitlatch

Instructor, General Education, CC

EMERITI

Dr. Thomas Dell

Professor, Rehabilitation and Human Services, CHPS

Dr. Stuart Snyder

Professor, Biological and Physical Sciences, CHPS

Dr. Patricia Vettel-Becker

Professor, Art, CLASS

SENIOR LECTURER

Michele McMullen, MS, MA,

RDN, LN

Senior Lecturer, Biological and Physical Sciences, CHPS

Patricia Nichols

Senior Lecturer, Rehabilitation and Human Services, CHPS

Dr. Steven A. Wiles

Senior Lecturer, Biological and Physical Sciences, CHPS

RETIREES

Ms. Lynette Schwalbe

Adjunct Assistant Professor, Educational Theory and Practice, COE

Dr. Patricia Vettel-Becker

Professor, Art, CLASS

PROGRAM

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Dr. Stefani Hicswa, Chancellor

Ceremony

Dr. J. Richard Beer, Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Presentation of Awards

Mr. Vikash Kumar, ASMSUB President, will present the ASMSUB Outstanding Faculty Awards

Mr. John Keener, Interim Director of the Montana Center for Inclusive Education, will present two MCIE Awards for Support of Students with Disabilities

Ms. Leigh Ann Ruggiero, Assistant Professor of English, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences, will present the Dr. Tasneem Khaleel Award for Mentoring Young Professional Women

Ms. Abby Cook, Associate Director of International Studies, will present the Promoting International Student Success Award

Dr. Joy Honea, Professor of Sociology, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences, will present an Outstanding Service Learning Award

Ms. Jodi Lightner, Chair and Professor of Art, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences, will present the Excellence Award for Non-Tenured Faculty

Mr. Vern Gagnon, Dean, City College, will present the City College Faculty Leadership Award

Dr. Susan Gilbertz, Dean, College of Business, will present the the Early Achievement Research and Creative Accomplishments Award

Dr. Susan Gilbertz, Dean, College of Business, will present the the Outstanding Career Achievement Research and Creative Accomplishments Award

Dr. Melanie Reaves, Interim Dean, College of Education, will present a Faculty Excellence Award

Dr. Samuel Boerboom, Chair and Professor of Communication, will present a Faculty Excellence Award

Ms. Jodi Lightner, Chair and Professor of Art, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences, will present a Faculty Excellence Award

Ms. Tami Haaland, Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences, will present the Winston & Helen Cox Fellowship Award

Dr. Stefani Hicswa and Dr. J. Richard Beer will present the Walter & Charlotte Pippenger Excellence in Innovation Award

Achieving Tenure, Emeriti, Senior Lecturer, Years of Service, and Retirees

Closing Remarks

Dr. Stefani Hicswa, Chancellor

ASMSUB OUTSTANDING FACULTY AWARDS

Eric “The Truth” Gilbertsen

Instructor
General Education
CC

Dr. Heather Thompson-Bahm

Assistant Professor
Business Administration
COB

Daniel Charlton

Assistant Professor
Educational Theory and Practice
COE

Carl Castles, Ph.D.

Department Chair; Associate Professor
Biological and Physical Sciences
CHPS

Dr. Hashini Herath

Assistant Professor
Biological and Physical Sciences
CHPS

Dr. Thomas Regele

Associate Professor
English, Philosophy & Modern Languages
CLASS

WINSTON & HELEN COX FELLOWSHIP AWARD

Dr. Jennifer Lillian Lodine-Chaffey



*Assistant Professor, English,
Philosophy & Modern
Languages, CLASS*

Dr. Lodine-Chaffey has been at MSU Billings since 2022, and is making a mark not only at the university in teaching and mentoring students, but also in scholarly research that looks at the use of narratives related to criminal executions.

Her work focuses on literary and historical understandings of crime, punishment, and death in early modern England. Her scholarly output includes a published book manuscript, 12 peer-reviewed articles, four book chapters in edited collections, and eight book reviews.

In August 2022, the University of Alabama Press published her monograph, *A Weak Woman in a Strong Battle: Women and Public Execution in Early Modern England*. Subsequently, reviews and notices about her monograph appeared in several academic journals, including *Early Modern Literary Studies*, the *Sixteenth Century Journal*, and *Renaissance and Reformation*.

In the classroom, she helps students think about not only the writing process but understand the historical and cultural context of the works they read.

“Whether teaching students to think about literary works as reflections of their contemporary culture or working with students on designing technical documents, my purpose as an instructor is to help students develop critical thinking and writing skills,” she says.

Dr. Lodine-Chaffey has developed new courses at MSUB and has served as the faculty advisor for *The Rook*, the university’s literary and art journal.

FACULTY EXCELLENCE AWARD

Mark Earnhart



Professor, Art, CLASS

Mark has been working with students and their sculptures at MSU Billings since 2014. Whether a student chooses to work in wood, fiber, metal, ceramics, or other materials, he has the technical ability to help students succeed. He is well-respected among artists in the Billings art community and was featured at a two-person exhibition at the Yellowstone Art Museum.

Just as important, according to a nominator, Mark knows how to connect with students so they can feel comfortable tackling new challenges in the art studio.

"He meets each student where they are at in their familiarity of the sculpture studio and crafts a curious and conceptually driven curriculum that challenges each student," the nominator wrote. "Though they balk at the scary new experiences within the wood shop and welding shop, they remember the lessons learned and each project built and speak of them with awe that they have come so far in their studio skills within a short time."

Mark has single-handedly developed a studio safety course required for all art majors, which met a critical need for meeting accreditation standards for the Art Department. "Earnhart has always problem-solved safe practices with all studio areas in the department, making sure that both faculty and students maintain good health and safety standards."

MCIE AWARD FOR SUPPORT OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Dr. Elaine Westbrook



*Assistant Professor,
Educational Theory and
Practice, COE*

Dr. Westbrook joined the MSU Billings faculty in 2021 and teaches integrated science courses and labs to elementary education majors. She hosts, co-designs, and facilitates informal STEM curricula for the Movin'On Camp (MCIE), GeoSpatial Skills (MSU), and the Co-ed and Girls' STEM camps (MSUB). She also coordinates outreach STEM activities, which involves MSU Billings graduate and undergraduate student facilitators in nearby rural and Native

American communities.

Her research work on "STEMulating Interest with a Rural Place-Conscious Curriculum," was published in the journal *Theory & Practice in Rural Education* in 2022, and she has presented on STEM interest among rural youth. Other research areas include the influences of Native American culture and its integration with western scientific methods, such as documenting the Northern Cheyenne Star Stories and integrating Makerspaces in Apsáalooke communities.

Dr. Westbrook is the Montana Space Grant Consortium Faculty Affiliate, representing MSU Billings among the state's universities and tribal colleges.

MCIE AWARD FOR SUPPORT OF
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Dr. Paula L. McMahon



Dept. Chair; Associate Professor, Rehabilitation and Human Services, CHPS

Dr. McMahon is the chair and an Associate Professor for the Department of Rehabilitation and Human Services. During her eight years at MSU Billings, she has taught a variety of courses in rehabilitation and mental health counseling related to the varied aspects of disability for individuals and families.

Her areas of specialization are the Americans with Disabilities Act, Ethics, and disability Rights with a deep commitment to community

integration, inclusive employment practices, factors impacting disclosure of disability, and transition for students with disabilities into post-secondary opportunities. She has presented numerous times on the national, state, and local level on these topics.

One of her students noted that Dr. McMahon “has gone above and beyond to make sure students with disabilities get access to her materials.” Dr. McMahon has truly been an advocate of her students encouraging them in their academic journeys towards realizing their dreams.

“She is a brilliant professor who is not afraid to have difficult conversations with students who want to enter the mental health profession,” one nominator wrote. “She will also have conversations with people with opposing viewpoints with patience and empathy.”

FACULTY EXCELLENCE
AWARD

Melinda R. Aley, Ph.D.



Assistant Professor, Communication, CLASS

Dr. Aley has been studying communication topics and issues for more than a decade and has been teaching at MSU Billings since 2021. She is a prolific researcher and writer and has 67 peer-reviewed conference papers to her credit.

A nominator wrote that Dr. Aley is not only committed to the teaching/learning process with students but is also committed to being a part of the university community. She started the MSUB “Comm Club” for students and is

the faculty advisor. She provides service to the college on committees and volunteers at the Billings Public Library. Dr. Aley is also the chair of the Professional Development Committee and serves on the Library Committee at MSUB.

On top of it all, she still manages to have time to support MSUB’s student athletes, cheering at soccer, volleyball, and basketball games.

“I have rarely encountered a more engaged, dedicated member of our faculty,” the nominator wrote. “Melinda is 100% dedicated to her students and to teaching. She regularly participates in CTL programming and is always working on pedagogical improvement.”

FACULTY EXCELLENCE
AWARD

Dr. Robin Heigis-Cormier



*Assistant Professor,
Educational Theory and
Practice, COE*

Dr. Heigis-Cormier, who holds a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from MSU Billings, has a lifelong commitment to teaching and the counseling profession.

She has worked on curriculum development and presentations focusing on trauma-informed teaching practices as well as classroom tactics for learning resiliency. She frequently collaborates with colleagues in the elementary and secondary education programs, speaking regularly on social-

emotional learning.

Her nominators also note the contributions that Dr. Heigis-Cormier has made toward the accreditation process of the College of Education.

"Becoming accredited is a highly rigorous process in which both initial and advanced licensure programs prepare evidence of meeting five separate standards," her nominator wrote. "The School Counseling program is the College of Education's only advanced program, according to (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation) guidelines and has never been reviewed before."

The nominators said she revamped each of the courses in her program to align with accreditation requirements, including courses taught by adjuncts. She also established an advisory committee for the school counseling program, a step that gives stakeholders a seat at the table regarding the program.

In addition, Dr. Heigis-Cormier has been instrumental in creating a 60-credit master's program for school counseling that includes Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor credentialing. That effort helps address the shortage of mental health professionals across Montana.

DR. TASNEEM KHALEEL AWARD FOR MENTORING
YOUNG PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

Dr. Elaine Westbrook



*Assistant Professor,
Educational Theory and
Practice, COE*

Dr. Westbrook has been active in mentoring future education leaders since she arrived at MSU Billings. She focuses on making connections between students and faculty in new ways, using science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) as a pathway. She is a former Girl Scouts leader and understands what it means to make meaningful connections.

"As a woman in STEM, she undertook projects that would advance, nourish, and support young women in the community to understand their potential and the affordances that a career in STEM could ultimately provide them," one nominator wrote. "Through offering programs and supporting students on campus (giving them a truly transformative experience), she ushered forth a vision for a promising future for these young women."

Another nominator wrote that as liaison for the sciences, Dr. Westbrook leads by example for young women. She has provided summer camps dedicated to STEM topics and has recruited undergraduate students to be involved in the Montana Space Grant Consortium. "Dr. Westbrook facilitates meaningful engagements so as to support our young professional women who will one day flourish as a direct result and byproduct of her practices," he wrote.

PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT SUCCESS AWARD

Dr. Heather Thompson-Bahm



*Assistant Professor, Business
Administration, COB*

A small business owner and educator in Colorado and Montana, Dr. Thompson-Bahm uses her work in the classroom, in-person mentorship, and involvement in global initiatives to have a positive influence on international students. Her support for those students has been instrumental not only in their academic success, but also in their holistic development and integration into the university community.

One of her supporters points out that she has recognized the importance of exposing students to global perspectives, taking extra steps to help students understand that in an increasingly interconnected world, they need to understand how to engage in diverse viewpoints.

"One of Dr. Thompson-Bahm's most significant contributions to the success of international students at MSUB has been her ability to integrate global components into her lesson plans and curriculum," he wrote. "By doing so, she has helped foster a classroom environment that promotes international communication and understanding among all students, both domestic and international."

An international student wrote that her dedication to promoting international student success has left a significant mark on the university.

"Through her curriculum, she fosters cross-cultural understanding, equipping all her students with essential skills for a globalized world," the student wrote. "In addition to her classroom efforts, Dr. Thompson-Bahm actively supports international initiatives on campus, collaborating with various departments to enhance the experience of international students. She has organized workshops and events that celebrate cultural diversity, and she mentors international students, helping them navigate challenges and fostering a sense of belonging."

OUTSTANDING CAREER ACHIEVEMENT RESEARCH
AND CREATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AWARD

Dr. Ying Wang



*Professor, Business
Administration, COB*

Dr. Wang has been instrumental in peer-reviewed journal publishing efforts at the MSUB College of Business over the past several years, with 25 published articles and one recently accepted to her credit.

Since 2012, Dr. Wang has published at least once a year, with some years including two or three publications. This significant research accomplishment reinforces her dedication to intellectual contributions and scholarly work, according to a nominator. The published work covers topics and areas such as earnings management,

effective tax rates of industry, ownership structure and corporate governance, as well as research on tax policies related to Chinese companies.

"While the number of publications she has is outstanding, she also provides significant faculty support when it comes to guiding the department in decisions related to caliber of journal," a nominator wrote. "With our accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, she has been instrumental in ensuring our new tenure and promotion guidelines include the rigor required to meet their standards. She can easily explain what types of journals should be considered and offers guidance to other faculty who may be struggling to execute their research agendas."

In addition to her research, Dr. Wang has made a mark on the lives of undergraduate students in the College of Business. She continues to display a commitment to excellence in teaching, constantly adapting approaches to meet the needs of the student body. She has developed a curriculum that integrates newest accounting and tax policy with real world accounting challenges, providing students with a holistic understanding of the discipline.

EARLY ACHIEVEMENT RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AWARD

Jessie Perius, Ph.D.



Assistant Professor, Business Administration, COB

Recently recognized as a recipient of The Billings Gazette's "40 Under Forty" award, alumna Dr. Jessie Perius has a strong track record of providing students with transformative educational experiences. She also has a remarkable resume of scholarship. When she earned her doctorate in Business Administration from Northcentral University in 2021, her dissertation work focused on understanding why millennials like to drink craft beer. This study not only illustrates her research acumen

but also her capacity to explore relevant market trends that influence managerial decisions.

Dr. Perius joined the College of Business as a part-time instructor in 2016 and began in her current role in 2021. Her scholarly work has garnered recognition not just at the state level, but nationally and internationally. One of her nominators wrote, "In 2024, she published a significant article in the *Journal of Education for Business* on synchronous global engagement in international business education. This publication, among others, demonstrates her innovative approach to integrating technology into teaching and learning, a necessity in today's business landscape."

Beyond her publications, Dr. Perius has been awarded several grants highlighting her commitment to advancing global education and continued research. She was a recipient of a UISFL grant, enabling her to travel to France to develop expertise in global studies. She continues to share her research and has presented at ResearchFest! twice where she delivered insightful presentations on Ethnographic Research Using Household Trash and the Economic Impact of Swifties' Revenge Tourism sparking meaningful conversation among peers.

OUTSTANDING SERVICE LEARNING AWARD

Dr. Hope Dewell Gentry



Assistant Professor, Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, CLASS

Dr. Dewell Gentry teaches political science at MSU Billings, but the hands-on experience she gives her students takes students from the philosophical to the realistic.

As the instructor of the methodology courses in the political science program in the Department of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, one of the classes Dr. Dewell Gentry teaches is PSCI 345, "Media, Public Opinion, & Polling." During that course, she leads

students through the design of a political survey that becomes the annual "Mountain States Poll." During the experience, students help craft the questions, participate in calling respondents and recording answers, and assist in data analysis. The work in the class takes time and dedication to detail, but the students benefit from the experience, a nominator wrote.

"As part of the project, students choose an item or items to analyze and report on independently," the nominator wrote. "At the conclusion of the poll, Dr. Dewell Gentry leads a press conference to announce the results, and students join her to give their own analysis of the items they worked on. The Mountain States Poll is nationally recognized and is regularly cited by such reputable statisticians/polling organizations as Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight. The work done by Dr. Dewell Gentry and her students is timely, relevant, and crucial to understanding politics and political polling in the U.S."

The finished project is something that pundits in Montana, the region, and the nation reference when talking about Montana politics.

**EXCELLENCE AWARD
FOR NON-TENURED FACULTY**

Robin Earles



Gallery Director; Assistant Professor, Art, CLASS

As a member of the MSU Billings faculty since 2020, Robin has taught a variety of classes ranging from visual languages to painting to printmaking. She is also the director of Northcutt Steele Gallery, where she manages the schedule of exhibits that showcase the artwork of faculty, students and visiting artists.

Robin has had solo exhibitions in California and Montana and her work has been featured in several group and juried exhibitions in the region. Her nominators noted her ability to take the teaching

and learning opportunities at Northcutt Steele Gallery to new levels, benefitting not only MSU Billings, but the entire Billings community.

"Her generous spirit extends invitations to working artists to engage with our students, faculty, staff, and community to partake and learn from the guest artists and their impressive exhibitions," one nominator wrote. "Some of these guest artists have been part of our growing artist in residency program. Robin has singlehandedly taken on the development of this artist in residency program to bring innovative international artists to campus."

A key focus of her role at the gallery is to curate exhibitions that can provide new insights and research in contemporary art, a nominator wrote.

"Robin's flexibility in working with guest artists, established faculty, busy students, and the hungry community to bring cutting edge professional exhibitions to our university showcases her abilities to bring worlds together in a single room."

**CITY COLLEGE
LEADERSHIP AWARD**

Dr. Nicole Bogunovich



Instructor, Computer Systems Technology, CC

A business educator who has been instrumental in redesigning curriculum and programs, Dr. Bogunovich is being recognized for her leadership and commitment to students.

Since joining the faculty in 2018, she has developed curriculum for management, marketing, accounting, and finance courses to reflect the changes and needs within each industry. She has utilized effective teaching strategies to design and implement new learning modalities for two-year students. Along with

her coursework, she has become proficient in multiple programs that improve the teaching/learning process.

Dr. Bogunovich has had previous experience with School District 2 as a business educator and technology integration specialist. That experience, one nominator wrote, makes her an excellent representative of MSU Billings and education in general.

"Nicole has garnered recognition outside the MSUB community as well through her service to Business Professionals of America and the American National Leadership Conference," the nominator wrote. "She volunteers at Billings Christian School and for the Boulder Arrowhead Little League. More impressively, she has served as a mentor for three School District 2 teachers offering BGEN 105 for dual enrollment credit. Doing so has only strengthened the partnership between City College and MSUB with the District."

Through her work in the classroom and in the community, Dr. Bogunovich has contributed to MSU Billings' goal "to offer a quality experience for all those who interact with the university."