



Patrick F. Leahy

President's Awards For Excellence | Fall Convocation | August 24, 2016

Good morning. Thank you all for being here this morning.

Let me welcome in a special way the Chair of our Board of Trustees, Dan Cardell. Few alumni care more about Wilkes than Dan. As you can tell, he is a big supporter of our entire faculty and staff. Join me in thanking Dan for his support.

When we were building the Gateway to the Future Strategic Plan, I heard loudly and clearly that we at Wilkes should recognize each other more formally and more regularly as a way to build community on campus. Over the first two years of the Plan we improved and expanded the TREC Awards for faculty and academic staff, and USAC just launched the Caught Being Colonel Awards for staff. A few years ago I also created the President's Medal to recognize lifetime dedication to Wilkes, offered each year at the Founders Gala.

Today, I want to inaugurate five new, cross-university awards called the President's Awards for Excellence. The idea is to offer awards that promote and celebrate our five values — Scholarship, Innovation, Community, Mentoring, and Diversity — one award for each.

In consulting with FAC and USAC, we created the following process. 1) Anyone in the community (faculty or staff) could nominate anyone else in the community to receive that award which exemplifies the spirit of each value. 2) I would collect these nominations, share them with the Cabinet, and solicit feedback from the Cabinet about each nominee. 3) Then, based on the feedback, I would make the final selections. Therefore, if anyone is disappointed that their nominee was not selected, you have me (and me alone) to blame.

I sent out the initial call for nominations in mid-June. Early responses were minimal. (I started wondering whether this was a good idea or not.) Then, the nominations started coming in – and coming in. In the end, I received 49 nominations, and they were beautiful. It was very heartening for me to hear such nice things said about our colleagues. I want to thank all of you who took the time and effort to nominate one of your peers.

However, this created a different problem. How to decide on just five from so many? It was a very difficult task. Of course, any time we recognize one person it is at the expense of many other well-deserving nominees. With that in mind, here is my attempt at first-time President's Awards for Excellence.

Once I announce the recipient of each award, I will ask them to come up and receive their award. If the winners are interested in saying a word or two to all of you, they are welcome to do so, but there is absolutely no obligation.

Scholarship: For his efforts in advancing knowledge through discovery and research to better educate our constituents, the inaugural President's Award for Excellence in Scholarship goes to Dr. Mike Steele, Professor of Biology.

Innovation: For his efforts in promoting programs, ideas, and sustainable practices (in particular, as they relate to rebuilding an outdated network in unheralded ways), the inaugural President's Award for Excellence in Innovation goes to John Carlin, Director of Network & Technology Infrastructure.

Community: For her efforts in appreciating and collaborating with mutual respect to foster a sense of belonging, the inaugural President's Award for Excellence in Community goes to Addy Malatesta, Director of Athletics.

Mentoring: For his efforts in nurturing individuals to understand and act on their abilities while challenging them to achieve great things, the inaugural President's Award for Excellence in Mentoring goes to Lt. Col. Mark Kaster, Lecturer of Environmental Engineering & Earth Science and Veterans Counselor.

Diversity: For her efforts in embracing differences and uniqueness through sincerity, awareness, inclusion, and sensitivity, the inaugural President's Award for Excellence in Diversity goes to Dr. Helen Davis, Associate Professor of English.

Join me in recognizing all of our winners this first year! Thank you.