

**MTSU's EXL Scholars Program Honors Five "Outstanding" Faculty Members
For the 2017-2018 Academic Year**

The Experiential Learning (EXL) Scholars Program at MTSU is designed to enhance student learning through practical experiences in their fields of study beyond the traditional classroom setting and engage the students directly in service learning projects. Currently having more than 300 faculty members, the program has more than 600 course sections offered throughout the university and more are added each semester.

Each year, nominations are received for the EXL awards for students, faculty, community partners, and administrators who have best demonstrated "distinguished records of service/activity in the EXL Program." The MTSU EXL Scholars Committee selects the winners for each category.

Five faculty members received the "Outstanding EXL Faculty Award". The following educators were recognized for their leadership and excellence in the field of experiential learning.

Dr. Michelle Boyer-Pennington, Psychology

In Dr. Boyer-Pennington's General Psychology class, each student identifies a group that he or she shows "implicit bias" towards, and then the student does a service project involving that particular group to learn more about them.

In her nomination, Professor Teresa Davis stated, "Michelle is very creative and thoughtful about the experiences she includes in her classes. These are the kinds of experiences that have an impact and that students remember. The students gain invaluable insights from these types of projects."

Davis added that she has had students in her classes, "talk about the projects they did in Michelle's course and how much they learned. There are students who want to talk EXL classes after they have experienced one of Michelle's courses."

"EXL courses encourage students to think differently, to be more open to ways of thinking that are different than their own, and to identify issues they care about. My goal is not to tell students what to think, but to teach them how to think and become thinkers. The EXL program has provided me with the resources and confidence to bring those goals to my classes. I am grateful for that." – Michelle Boyer-Pennington, Ph.D.



Robert "Bob" Gordon, Media Arts

Well known for his students' excellent work at Bonnaroo and other major events, Gordon's classroom and extra-curricular work has provided students with real-world, hands-on experiences in television production, where students produce contemporary television programming. His students produce, create, manage, direct, and crew live sports events, live concerts, live dance events, live musicals, multi-location election specials, total eclipse specials, game shows, and a successful PBS station television series, "The Songwriters", co-produced with the "Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame" and hosted by College of Media and Entertainment Dean, Ken Paulson. The series is directed by Gordon and crewed and edited by students and it currently reaches 120 PBS stations, in 70 markets, in 25 states, over 30% of the country. Season Four tapes this August for an October release.

Gordon's students have produced, directed, managed, and crewed national award-winning MT football, basketball, volleyball, and soccer games for ESPN3 and the BeIN Sports Network; Bonnaroo Concerts, Capitol Records Street Party Concerts, Nashville Symphony performances, WMOT Live streamed concerts and a performances for a host of other organizations, performers, and Grammy Award Winners. This September, Gordon will produce/direct "The Tennessee Gubernatorial Debates" from The Murphy Center, seen on PBS stations across the state. The special will be crewed by Media Arts students.

“Robert Gordon and his classes provided me the experience that set me apart from other students in competing programs and allowed me to go into my first several productions with a good handle on not only equipment but also operating procedures and proper hierarchy. This type of learning enabled myself and other students to make the various mistakes that unfortunately have to be made, but in a forgiving environment, that has no long term, negative, impact on our careers. In my opinion, the experience I was given at MTSU through Experiential Learning and Robert Gordon as a professor is one of the only reasons I was given my first real opportunity and then from there, using the skills I had obtained, enabled me to succeed and succeed in a great way.” (Topher Davidson)

“Professor Bob Gordon's teaching really shines through his experience-based learning classes. He does his best to prepare students for post-graduation by having his classes work on many events inside and outside of MTSU. These events include sports, concerts, game shows, talk shows, etc. He has firsthand experience on working on these types of events himself, so he knows the importance of getting students out of their chairs and into the field. Thanks to Professor Gordon and his experience-based courses, I feel very prepared and confident in my abilities for starting my career after graduation.” (Laura Morgan)

Gordon explained, “Both in class and in extra-curricular activities, I have strived to make every class and every extra-curricular project to be hands-on, realistic, true-to-life experiences for my students.

“I am not here to tell you how things used to be or how they should be. I am here to teach you how things are.” – Professor Bob Gordon

Dr. Lucy Matthews, Marketing

Dr. Matthews has taught several EXL courses including Professional Selling, Promotion, Advanced Selling, and Dale Carnegie courses. She completed the faculty fellow program which included having a mentor evaluate her course teaching. She used their advice and feedback from students to continue to keep the courses up to date and active for student engagement.

She explained that, “In Dale Carnegie courses, students not only learn the human relation principles, but they are required to live out those principles and report to the class on the application. In Professional Selling, a mandatory event for the class is held each semester in which outside employers are brought onto campus to evaluate the students’ attempt at applying the principles taught in the course. This event has resulted in the employment of students with the local community employers that attend the event. In her Advanced Selling course, sale program sponsors are brought in to provide real world examples of course content and to conduct exercises in negotiating. These classroom visits by businesses have resulted in several internship positions for students, benefitting both the students and the community businesses.”

“I am a strong proponent of learning by doing. I want students to be engaged in the content taught in the course and feel confident in their ability to do the work related to that material.” – Dr. Lucy Matthews



Dr. Hanna Park, Public Relations

In her nomination, Dr. Zeny Sarabia-Panol said, “Dr. Park has done a tremendously fine job with the EXL courses that she is teaching, not only benefitting the students in honing their knowledge and skills but also helping 24 different community and campus organizations as well as local businesses.”

Dr. Sarabia-Panol also added, “Because all EXL projects in her (Dr. Hannah Park) classes involve oral presentations, business documents (PR audit report, research report, campaign book), and peer evaluation, her students benefit from the feedback that their clients and other PR professionals provide. Additionally, they learn from their peers as well.”

“I really loved being in your class this semester! I really learned the basics and got a very good understanding about the field. I’m very excited to continue learning public relations. Your teaching methods and interaction with the class made me even more excited to start this new chapter in life.” (PR major, Sophomore)

Dr. Park believes, “Experiential Learning is the best way to engage students and help them develop continuing skills in the ever-changing technology world. The EXL projects have contributed to build bridges between MTSU and community partners.”

“I will continue to engage my students in EXL Projects, which will enhance their communication and management skills, preparedness to obtain a job in the profession, and life-long learning skills.” – Dr. Hanna Park

Dr. Ben Stickle, Criminal Justice

In his nomination, Daniel Pfeifer said, “EXL is an integral part of Professor Stickle’s courses and a vital component of his students’ learning. Having been one of the architects of the EXL program, based on my experiences with Professor Stickle and the materials/activities he’s designed, I believe his work his work exemplifies the excellence of student learning experiences sought by the EXL Program.”

Some of Dr. Stickle’s course activities are aligned to provide a continuous opportunity for students to learn, engage material inside and outside the course, experience different elements of the profession, communicate what they have learned, and reflect on how they would apply what they have learned. The results have been dozens of small opportunities to engage in experiential learning during the courses.

Students complete activities involving searching for and analyzing crime statistics, conducting a home security audit, analyzing the Broken Windows theory and providing photos and descriptions of a community where this is occurring. They conduct a search for jobs related to the field twice throughout the course and report on their findings, visit a local retail store and identify objects easily stolen and evaluate security measures and more—all in one of Dr. Stickle’s Criminal Justice courses.

Dr. Stickle believes, “As college transitions into an online teaching format, this ability to apply EXL principles to an online environment is essential to advance the concepts of EXL and ensure that students are receiving the same learning, experiences, and faculty engagement they receive in-seat.”

His students have indicated his assignments helped them be more involved and think in different ways. “They are stepping outside of the texts and classrooms and engaging in the in the world around them, and as a result, learning and experiencing the profession.” – Ben Stickle, Ph.D.

