

SIUE Alumni Association tabs VanSlette as 2018 Great Teacher

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EDWARDSVILLE - The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Alumni Association has named Sarah VanSlette, PhD, as the 48th recipient of the Great Teacher Award. A seven-year faculty member in the College of Arts and Sciences, VanSlette is an associate professor in the Department of Applied Communications Studies (ACS) and currently serves as the ACS graduate program director.

VanSlette will be recognized during the 1 p.m. fall 2018 commencement ceremony on Saturday, Dec. 15 in the Vadalabene Center and will also serve as a commencement speaker. She receives a plaque and a \$1,000 award.

“This award is so special to me, because it comes from SIUE alumni, my former students,” VanSlette said. “These students have been incredibly important to me, and have brought me such joy. To read their nomination letters was moving in a way that only a teacher can understand – knowing you made a difference in someone else’s life, and that your effort and care were appreciated and remembered.”

“I try to stand out as a professor by learning what each student needs in order to be successful, and I try to tailor my classes to meet those needs,” she added. “To hear from some of those students that they have the careers and the lives that they had hoped for, in some part because of me and my classes, is extremely special.”

VanSlette, who is completing a three-year elected position as the secretary of the Public Relations Division of the National Communication Association, pointed out that communication is at the heart of every career. “It is only fitting that we, as communication professors, make our communication personalized for each student and that they are impacted positively by what we say and do,” she said. “Knowing that my former students have become successful professional communicators, and they were inspired by watching me and learning from me – that’s the ultimate compliment.”

Previous students submitted impressive nominations on VanSlette’s behalf. “Dr. Sarah VanSlette is a professor not only of applied communication studies, but also of life,” said 2018 ACS alumnus Dylan Stanley. “With over a decade of experience in the classroom, she teaches from the heart and from real-life – that’s what makes her a remarkable professor and deserving of this honor.”

McKenzi McClain, 2016 and 2018 ACS alumna shares, “Dr. V has the ability to connect with her students no matter their age, skill sets, personalities, learning styles, etc. ... and she does so with the utmost confidence and professionalism. She displays the most positive outlook and embraces each class with an outstanding personality and mentality. She not only makes each of her students feel welcome, but she also brings so much joy

and fun to each class. She is always innovating, incorporating new ideas and staying up to date on the latest and greatest trends, social spheres, etc. and this is imperative in our world today!”

“Now employed on the development team at the Saint Louis Zoo, I am confident in saying that I would not be where I am today without the constant support and encouragement I have received from Dr. VanSlette,” echoed 2016 ACS alumna Taylor Keel. “I am forever grateful to SIUE for providing the educator, mentor and cheerleader that I have in Dr. VanSlette”

VanSlette’s recent publications include articles in *Case Studies in Strategic Communication*, *Communication Quarterly*, and book chapters in the edited volumes *Culture, Race, and Class-Based Perspectives in Public Relations* at Lexington, *The Handbook of Communication and Corporate Reputation* at Wiley-Blackwell, and *The Plugged-in Professor* at Oxford University Press.

VanSlette enjoys her ongoing research on startups and her involvement in the St. Louis startup community at T-Rex and Venture Café. Her earlier research on “the St. Louis question” (“Where’d you go to high school?”) has been featured in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, the *Riverfront Times*, KSDK-TV, KMOX Radio, and other local and national media.

VanSlette earned a bachelor’s in communication and English from Saint Louis University. She achieved both master’s and doctoral degrees in communication from Purdue University.

In 1970, the SIUE Alumni Association established the Great Teacher Award to recognize excellence in instruction and student interaction. Alumni, colleagues or current students nominate SIUE faculty members. The nominators provide their perspective on those individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to excellence and originality in their teaching, superior knowledge of their subject matter, original and innovating classroom presentations, and who demonstrated concern for students both inside and outside of the classroom. Those nominated have had a tremendous impact on the lives of their students, which carries on long past graduation.