

Graduate School Presents 2021 Outstanding Teaching Assistant Awards

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE – In acknowledgment of exceptional performance in teaching and instruction, the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville has announced its 2021 Outstanding Teaching Assistant (TA) Award winners at the master's and doctoral levels.

Tammy Zanker, a native of Windsor, New York, earned Outstanding TA at the master's level. Receiving the top honor at the doctoral level is Jordan Smith.

Zanker earned a master's in biological sciences in May 2021 from the Department of Biological Sciences, and served as a TA for several biology courses, including Introduction to Biology, Genetics, and Bacteriology. She's received high praise from her faculty for her strong foundation in her discipline, effectiveness in instruction, and unwavering commitment to student success.

In a nomination letter, Zanker's supervisor, Chrissy Simmons, an instructor and lab coordinator, commented on Zanker's advanced ability to navigate the laboratory setting. Simmons went on to explain how this allowed Zanker to tailor instructional methods to meet the needs of her students in real-time. When courses moved to a remote setting at the start of the pandemic, Zanker offered much-appreciated additional online sessions to accommodate her students.

"The learning environment should both stimulate and challenge each student while allowing them to develop necessary skills and techniques throughout their college career. "She is not only committed to knowing all. Of her students by name," Simmons shared," but also to forging meaningful professional connections with them outside of the lab environment to encourage an open line of communication and trust."

Zanker is currently working as a research associate for RNAissance Ag. In that role, she is helping develop more sustainable biopesticides using RNAi technology that help preserve biodiversity while still helping the productivity of farms. She supports the development and production of biopesticides mainly by performing molecular and microbial research. She works routinely with bacteria, plants, and insects to test the functionality of the biopesticides.

"I am honored to have receive this award," Zanker said. "I loved being a TA, and learned so much from my students and the faculty I worked with. The experiences and knowledge I gained are invaluable. I want to thank SIUE and the biology department faculty for giving me the opportunity to be a TA. Thank you to Chrissy Simmons, Dr. Thomas Fowler, Jess Wright, Jon Clark and Dr. Amy Winn for their support. And, thank you to my students."

Jordan Smith, of Waterloo, is being recognized for her outstanding TA efforts at the doctoral level. Smith is currently pursuing the family nurse practitioner specialization in the doctorate of nursing practice (DNP) program, and has served as a TA in the School of Nursing's Simulated Learning Center since fall 2019. She is slated to complete a DNP in May 2022.

“I am beyond honored to have received this award,” she said. “This is my third year as a teaching assistant for the School of Nursing, and each year I love it more. This position has allowed me to interact with almost all of the undergraduate nursing students at SIUE, and has shown how much I love to teach in the classroom setting. All of the teaching assistants in the Simulation Lab work extremely hard, and I am thankful to be a part of such a great team.”

In her nomination, Smith’s supervisor, Amy Reed, PhD, RN, center director and assistant professor, noted Smith’s calm demeanor, helpful attitude, flexibility, and innovative instructional design. Smith is enthusiastically applauded for her professional excellence, creativity in discovering new approaches to ensure student understanding, and her dedication to preparing future nurses.

“Jordan does an excellent job of teaching undergraduate nursing students’ foundational knowledge and skills necessary to progress through the nursing program and into the clinical setting,” Reed shared. “There is now assignment or opportunity in helping students that she isn’t willing to take on and support.”

By preparing the next generation of leaders in a knowledge-based economy, SIUE’s [Graduate School](#) fulfills the region’s demand for highly trained professionals. Graduate program offerings include arts and sciences, business, education, engineering, nursing and interdisciplinary opportunities. SIUE professors provide students with a unique integration of theoretical education and hands-on research experiences. Students can obtain graduate certificates or pursue master’s degrees, and be part of a supportive learning and rich intellectual environment that is tailored to the needs of adult learners. The Graduate School’s Office of Research and Projects supports and raises the visibility of research and creative activity at SIUE, which ranks highest among its Illinois Board of Higher Education peers in total research and development expenditures according to the National Science Foundation’s Higher Education Research and Development Survey.