

The University of Alabama

University of Alabama News

Teaching Award Winners Honored at UA

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TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — The University of Alabama National Alumni Association has announced the 2011 recipients of the University's highest honor for excellence in teaching – the Outstanding Commitment to Teaching Awards.

This year's recipients are: Dr. Lawrence F. Kohl, Dr. Patrick R. LeClair and Seth Panitch, all of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Jannis L. Brakefield of the College of Human Environmental Sciences.

The 2011 OCTA recipients were recognized today by UA President Robert E. Witt at the fall faculty/staff meeting in the Bryant Conference Center. A presentation of awards is also held at NorthRiver Yacht Club with National Alumni Association President Dick Coffee.

Established in 1976, OCTA recognizes dedication to the teaching profession and the positive impact outstanding teachers have on their students. The National Alumni Association, which gives the annual OCTA awards, is made up of more than 31,000 active alumni and friends of the University organized into more than 100 local chapters nationwide. The association stimulates interest in and supports the betterment of the University and awards \$2.5 million per year in academic scholarships.

The 2011 OCTA winners are:



Jannis L. Brakefield

Assistant professor **Jannis L. Brakefield** joined the UA faculty in 1990 as an adjunct instructor in the department of consumer sciences. She taught financial planning courses while pursuing a professional career as a certified financial planner until 1994 when she left the corporate world to teach full-time at UA.

During the past 20 years, she has developed several innovative programs. She was the first to propose a freshman compass course curriculum, which was adopted in 1995 and continues to serve as a model standard. She envisioned and implemented, the Crenshaw Leadership Academy, which recognizes top students for their leadership performance and encourages them to reach their highest potential. She also developed resources for use by the UA Healthy Bama/Healthy Finances initiative to help all students learn and use upper-level money management skills.

Brakefield has valued experiential learning through practical application designed to prepare students to work successfully in leadership roles that help consumers attain economic well-being. For many years, she hosted a group of students to New York City for her "Wall Street Study Tour," for an up-close view of the world's most powerful financial district.

As the department's internship coordinator, she maintains strong networking connections with financial industry leaders and employers, and she serves as academic adviser and mentor to some 50 students each year in her department.

Brakefield received her bachelor's and master's degrees in consumer economics from the University. She is the recipient of numerous awards for her work on campus, including the Joseph S. Rowland Teaching Excellence Award and the ODK Walter R. Guyton Student Service Award.



Dr. Lawrence F. Kohl

Dr. Lawrence F. Kohl joined UA's history department in 1987 after teaching at Fordham University in New York City. In his 25 years at UA, he has taught 30 different courses, including every level of history course from beginning surveys to directing doctoral dissertations.

In addition to teaching regularly in the Interim program and Summer Term, Kohl has taught in the Honors Program, the Blount Undergraduate Initiative and the Study Abroad Program. In the history department, he has served as both the director of undergraduate and of graduate studies and as interim department chair. While director of graduate studies, he created and taught the first course on "Teaching History" for graduate students in the department.

Kohl's first historical interest was the political history of the decades immediately preceding the American Civil War. His book on the Age of Jackson, "The Politics of Individualism; Parties and the American Chapter in the Jacksonian Era," (Oxford University Press) is now in its sixth paperback printing. He has served on the advisory board for the Papers of Andrew Jackson, evaluated book manuscripts on the era for many publishers, and judged film projects for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

An interest in Irish participation in the American Civil War led Kohl to offer courses on both Irish and Irish-American history, as well as teach Irish history in UA's Study Abroad program in Ireland. He has published four edited books on the topic with Fordham University Press. Kohl has also been a historical adviser for novelists, painters and film makers working on the Civil War, and he has appeared in television documentaries on the Irish in the Civil War on the History Channel and the Smithsonian Channel.

He received his bachelor's degree magna cum laude in history from Harvard University and his master's and doctorate degrees in history from the University of Michigan. He is the recipient of the Last Lecture Award, the Lilly Teaching Scholar Award, and he is a Distinguished Teaching Fellow of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Dr. Patrick R. LeClair joined the UA department of physics and astronomy in 2005, following a three-year postdoctoral position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. At UA, he primarily teaches introductory and mid-level physics courses and maintains an active research group in magnetic and electronic materials.

Since 2008, LeClair has been the undergraduate director for physics and astronomy. His main achievements have been implementing personal, face-to-face advising for every major student every semester and championing the physics-electrical and computer engineering double major, which has been largely responsible for increasing majors nearly threefold in the last four years.

LeClair has been actively committed to revising the undergraduate physics curriculum. With the help of a teaching grant from the College of Arts and Sciences in 2006-2007, he developed and implemented a computerized laboratory system for introductory electricity and magnetism labs which has been in use ever since. In 2009-2010, he redesigned the sophomore "Modern Physics" laboratory with entirely new equipment and a custom laboratory manual. In fall 2009, he and Dr. Ray White



Dr. Patrick R. LeClair

developed a freshman seminar course to introduce potential physics and astronomy majors to the latest developments in the field.

At UA, LeClair has also been a pioneer in the use of social media, finding that students will be engaged by interacting with the tools they enjoy and feel comfortable with. Nearly every aspect of his courses can be monitored online with notes, tutorials and multiple venues for student interaction

LeClair's research primarily focuses on electrical and magnetic properties of novel materials and devices, and he maintains an active research laboratory in UA's MINT Center. He is the principal investigator on three National Science Foundation grants and one Department of Energy grant. He received his bachelor's degree in materials science from MIT and his doctorate cum laude in physics from Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands.



Seth Panitch

Seth Panitch is associate professor of acting and directs the MFA and BA acting programs for the department of theatre and dance at UA. Although his particular area of expertise is the study of classical theatre in performance, he has also developed on-camera acting courses in conjunction with the department of telecommunication and film to prepare graduates for the multi-medium reality of professional acting.

His retooling of the undergraduate and graduate acting curriculum includes technique coursework in musical improvisation, Suzuki physical training, classical clowning, character mask, film and television performance, comedic styles (from Shakespeare to Seinfeld) and stage combat.

He has directed 10 productions for the department of theatre and dance and performed onstage as a guest artist in "Moon Over Buffalo," "A Flea in Her Ear," and "Blithe Spirit." He directs the yearly MFA/Senior Actor NYC Showcase, which presents graduating actors the opportunity to audition before New York agents, producers and casting directors. He has also performed multiple times as President George Hutcheson Denny for various University functions.

In 2008, Panitch became the first American director in decades to helm a professional production for the Cuban Ministry of Culture when he directed a Spanish language production of Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice" at the Teatro Adolfo Llaurado in Havana. The following year, he brought up a company of professional Cuban actors to work with UA students on a production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

Nationally, Panitch has performed leading roles in multiple seasons at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival. He developed an internship with the festival for his MFA acting program, which placed several UA graduate actors in the CSF company this summer.

His play “Dammit, Shakespeare!” was produced off-Broadway at the Urban Stages Theatre and his play “Hell: Paradise Found” will be produced at the prestigious 59th Street Theatre on Park in July 2012. He wrote and co-directed the theatrical documentary “A Night in the Theatre” and his screenplays “29 and Holding” and “Restoration” are under option with the Joel Zwick Company and Adventures in Film, respectively.

Panitch received his bachelor’s degree in theatre, magna cum laude, distinction in major, from Occidental College and his MFA in classical performance from the University of Washington Professional Actor Training program.

The University of Alabama, a student-centered research university, is experiencing significant growth in both enrollment and academic quality. This growth, which is positively impacting the campus and the state's economy, is in keeping with UA's vision to be the university of choice for the best and brightest students. UA, the state's flagship university, is an academic community united in its commitment to enhancing the quality of life for all Alabamians.

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