I am proud to present this year’s edition of Vision, Innovation, Practice, featuring the 2017 winners of the University of South Carolina’s most prestigious teaching awards. The instructors profiled here come from a diverse range of fields and differ widely in their individual styles and classroom strategies — but they all share a genuine commitment to their students and the ability to find creative, successful ways to convey their expertise in the classroom.

Innovative teaching is the particular focus of the Garnet Apple Awards program, now in its second year. Sponsored by the Office of the Provost and the Center for Teaching Excellence, these awards showcase faculty members who consistently and successfully incorporate the latest developments in teaching into their practice. The 2017 Garnet Apple winners have applied innovation in challenging contexts such as the large undergraduate classroom, required Carolina Core courses, a high-pressure medical school classroom and a fully online service-learning course. These faculty members are building the university’s national and global reputation for teaching innovation.

The accomplishments of these distinguished faculty members demonstrate the university’s promise to deliver the very best current developments in teaching and learning to our students. Congratulations to all of our 2017 Garnet Apple, Mungo, Clinical Teaching, John J. Duffy and USC Education Foundation Graduate Teaching Assistant award winners.

Joan T.A. Gabel
Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
**Garnet Apple Award**

The Garnet Apple Award honors exceptional faculty members who demonstrate a commitment to best teaching practices and an ongoing record of developing innovative strategies to enhance student learning in their courses.
What is learning? What is teaching? What is justice? As head of the M.A.T. program in theater, Peter Duffy encourages his students to ponder exactly these types of questions. “Theater is a place where people can gather in real time to engage in these questions about what it means to be human,” says Duffy. But Duffy’s insights into the power and purpose of the theater aren’t reserved for graduate students planning to become drama teachers. He has also developed a reputation for innovation in the undergraduate classroom — thanks in part to a large section course on theater appreciation. Over a single semester, students in Duffy’s theater appreciation course research, write, produce and stage an original ethnodrama that ultimately serves as their final exam. “Honestly, I just kind of got tired of hearing myself talk so much, and I was trying to figure out how to get my students more involved,” he says. “I’m not there to dump knowledge into my students’ heads. I care deeply that learning is personally relevant and that students are emotionally engaged.”
Leslie Hendrix
Garnet Apple Award
Instructor, Department of Statistics
College of Arts and Sciences

Leslie Hendrix remembers the lack of support she felt in college, juggling three jobs and a full class schedule. She quit during her junior year. Now, with a bachelor's degree in mathematics and a doctorate in statistics from USC, she works to make sure the students in her classroom have the support and guidance they need to succeed. “If it weren’t for good professors and people who gave me a little push or the right words at the right time, I know I would not be here today. I believe that everybody deserves a shot at a good future.” For Hendrix, the real payoff is in the evaluation forms, cards, notes and emails from former students, who tell her she got them over their fears of math. “When I was younger, I didn’t feel I was that good at math. But when I came back to school [at USC], I had great professors who believed in me,” she says. “I want to be able to make other people feel that way.”
Shelley Jones
Garnet Apple Award
Assistant professor, English,
Extended University and Palmetto College

Shelley Jones says teaching is in her blood and has been a part of her life since childhood. “I come from educators. My mom was an English teacher,” says Jones. “I’ve also been very fortunate to have had excellent English teachers throughout my life who saw the potential in me before I saw it.” Jones is a problem solver. When she saw that some of her Palmetto College students would benefit from an alternative to the required internship course, Jones created a service-learning class that could provide comparable learning outcomes. The new course has required a whole new skill set for Jones, including creating partnerships with community organizations that can work with students at a distance. “Students can do their work on their own time as long as they’re meeting deadlines,” she says. “If they’re in their pajamas or after putting their kids to bed or getting off their second-shift job, they are able to then complete the work when it fits with their schedule.”
Mohammed Khalil
Garnet Apple Award
Clinical associate professor
USC School of Medicine-Greenville

A word that comes up often when Mohammed Khalil talks about his teaching style is “interactive.” Khalil believes his students understand concepts better when they’re active participants in absorbing information whether it’s through self-learning modules or computer-based labs. Students use the self-learning modules with embedded formative quizzes to prepare for class sessions. Follow-up activities occur in labs designed to foster collaboration between students while providing guidance and clinical relevance. “If you think about students today, they like to work in a group,” Khalil says. “They like guidance or direction, but they like to do many things themselves. They like to have some control, and they like to use the technology more.” Khalil’s curriculum vitae is littered with teaching awards and student testimonials that prove his philosophy works. And he puts that philosophy into practice outside of the classroom, working with students throughout the medical school as a student success program director to identify weaknesses that might be causing them to struggle. “I help them, and at the same time, I learn from them what they need,” he says.
One group of students attends Spanish class three days a week while another logs four days of classroom instruction. Hands down, the four-day-a-week students learn the language better than the three-dayers, right? Not so fast, say Nina Moreno and Paul Malovrh. The two Spanish faculty members experimented with a 100-level Spanish course, creating a flipped classroom model and comparing it with a traditional classroom-only course. The traditional course’s students logged less homework time and more classroom time but performed less well in actually learning the language compared to their flipped classroom amigos. “What happens with a flipped format is you’re giving them more responsibility,” Moreno says. “The class becomes more learner centered and not teacher centered.” Malovrh sees the flipped class approach to language instruction as a way to expedite the rate of learning. “I can’t change the route you take to learn a second language, but as the instructor there are things I can do to make the learning proceed more efficiently,” Malovrh says. “It’s not about passing the test but about speaking the language.”
Michael J. Mungo Teaching Award

The Michael J. Mungo Distinguished Professor Award, Undergraduate Teaching Award and Graduate Teaching Award recognize faculty members who have a sustained record of excellent teaching. The awards were endowed by the late Michael J. Mungo, a USC graduate and Columbia businessman who served with distinction on the university’s Board of Trustees from 1968 until his death in 2010.
Sourav Banerjee
Michael J. Mungo Undergraduate Teaching Award
Assistant professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering
College of Engineering and Computing

When Sourav Banerjee talks about teaching numerical and mathematical methods to engineering students, his enthusiasm is nearly palpable. But numbers weren’t always his thing. In fact, the Kolkata, India, native was barely passing math in middle school. But a math tutor told Banerjee how algorithms were first developed for counting raisins and nuts in ancient cultures. That was Banerjee’s light bulb moment — understanding the practicality behind all of those equations. It’s a lesson he still takes to heart. “Students get bogged down in how an equation works and forget about why it was developed in the first place. My job is to make the math more tangible, more touchable for my students,” he says. “I give them everyday examples about engineering principles at work and the math behind them.”

One of the challenges of teaching is igniting a passion for the material. “I’ve found that almost every student can connect to movies, so I give them examples of engineering applications from movies. I show them how engineering equations apply to each of their interests.”
David L. Barbeau
Michael J. Mungo Undergraduate Teaching Award
Associate professor, School of the Earth, Ocean and Environment
College of Arts and Sciences

David Barbeau doesn’t seek to teach students geologic fact so much as he wants them to learn how to learn and how to open their minds to new possibilities and perspectives. “The time and space scales of geology are so immense, so much larger than human perception, that you are forced to be able to think about things that you cannot fathom happening,” Barbeau says. He teaches a field-based introductory geology course so popular with students that admission is restricted to geology majors or those undecided on a major. The field component gets students out in the real world so they can extrapolate their own understanding rather than reading facts in a book. “Students are empowered,” Barbeau says. “With basically no discipline-specific prior knowledge, they realize they have translated what was once a seemingly nondescript exposure of rocks — similar to the hundreds they’ve driven or walked past in their lives — into a plausible geologic history, largely constructed from observations and interpretations made by themselves.”
Ralf Gothe
Michael J. Mungo Undergraduate Teaching Award
Professor, Department of Physics and Astronomy
College of Arts and Sciences

Gothe clearly loves physics — it’s the first thing he talks about in a discussion of his teaching philosophy — but he loves the opportunity to interact with students even more. “I will clearly enjoy it if they remember what we talked about in class,” he says. “But my main goal is for them to be able to apply what they’re learning to what they do, to learn how to improve the outcome even if they already have a solution.” Gothe says he tries to stay 100 percent focused on his students and their reaction to the material. “Teaching them physics is not the focus — they are the focus.” To that end, Gothe tries to anticipate questions students might ask in class and incorporates those queries into the material. He credits his Ph.D. mentor with giving him freedom to explore and find the correct solution, “which is what I want all of my students to have. If you have an idea and a concept, I want you to try it out to build your own success.”
Clifford Leaman
Michael J. Mungo Distinguished Professor of the Year
Professor, School of Music
College of Arts and Sciences

When she was in high school, Clifford Leaman’s oldest daughter told him she would be an oboist. Leaman, who teaches saxophone, admits he was a little surprised to hear her career plans. He asked her why. “She said, ‘Because I like what I see you do,’” Leaman says. “I told her, ‘That’s because I like what I’m doing.’ I’m passionate about my work. And I don’t like it. I love it.”

Leaman is in great demand as a soloist and clinician and has performed and taught throughout the world. But it’s the teaching that fulfills him. About 85 percent of his teaching load is one-on-one instruction, allowing him to develop strong personal bonds with students as he determines how to connect and ensure each one thrives. “You need intellect to make complex decisions quickly to be able to be an artist. If I just teach saxophone, I’m shortchanging the student. I teach responsibility, organization, how to overcome problems,” he says. “Even students who don’t end up in music should have learned something of value.”
Mindi Spencer

Michael J. Mungo Undergraduate Teaching Award

Associate professor, Department of Health Promotion, Education and Behavior; Institute for Southern Studies
Arnold School of Public Health, College of Arts and Sciences

Mindi Spencer integrates contemporary and local issues as a way to help students learn and synthesize information. In her “Southern Discomfort: Public Health in the American South” class, she asked students to reflect on the power of states’ rights by explaining how the controversy surrounding the Defense of Marriage Act was similar to the Prohibition Movement of the 1920s. In “Health Problems in a Changing Society,” she taught the fundamentals of disease epidemiology and public health preparedness by having students form small groups and design a plan for surviving the zombie apocalypse. “If we as teachers don’t adapt to the changing needs of our students, we will find ourselves at the end of our evolutionary branch,” Spencer says. “Undergraduates are hungry for genuine self-confidence. Much of what we teachers perceive to be indifference is only because students are not convinced that they can — and should — make a unique contribution to society,” she says. “I firmly believe that once they find their own voice in the classroom, they will be more willing to take that voice outside of the classroom and into their everyday lives.”
David Wethey

Michael J. Mungo Graduate Teaching Award
Professor, Department of Biological Sciences
College of Arts and Sciences

David Wethey came to Carolina 37 years ago with a mandate to design a graduate program for ecology. Today, Wethey can rattle off the accomplishments of students from the ’80s, the ’90s and just a few years ago. Over the years Wethey created a field course, a theoretical course and, with USC mathematics professor Matt Miller, a mathematical biology course that he thinks has given his students a leg up when job hunting after graduation. “It’s rare for a biologist to be fluent in the use of mathematics, so there is a real market niche for that kind of person,” Wethey says. “You get all kinds of people who want to work with you when you know how to do this sort of thing. If there is someone who can do simultaneous translation from math and biology, that’s an important skill. I try to treat graduate students as colleagues rather than as students, and I try to collaborate with them. It has to be a two-way interaction.”
John J. Duffy Excellence in Teaching Award

The John J. Duffy Excellence in Teaching Award recognizes outstanding teaching at the Palmetto College campuses. The award is named in honor of the longtime history professor and university administrator.
Jill Castiglia

John J. Duffy Excellence in Teaching Award
Instructor and chemistry department manager
USC Lancaster

Jill Castiglia begins each semester with a bang — and she always gets a reaction. “When I blow up hydrogen in a u-tube,” she says, “it sounds basically like a gunshot.” It’s a dramatic effect designed to demonstrate the redox reaction, which her classes revisit later in the semester, and it’s an effect made all the more dramatic by Castiglia’s approach, which she describes as fun, casual and highly interactive. She is constantly tweaking her approach, trying to keep the classroom fresh for her students and for herself. “I very rarely teach the same thing the same way twice,” she says. “I’m always interested in making things more engaging, to get students more involved in their own education.” The goal is to help them become better students. “I do not lecture. We’re constantly working problems together, doing demonstrations. I call on every single student, every single day, at least once, usually more like two or three times a day. They can’t just sit there like a vessel waiting to be filled.”
Clinical Practice Teaching Award

The Clinical Practice Teaching Award recognizes faculty members for outstanding teaching in clinical practice settings in the health professions, including nursing, pharmacy and medicine.
Sabra Custer
Clinical Practice Teaching Award
Clinical associate professor
College of Nursing

A nurse practitioner at the Palmetto Health-USC Medical Group, Sabra Custer was once in the shoes of the undergraduates she’s taught for seven years. It’s important that students understand what’s expected of them, she says, because the work they’re training to do is vital. That point is driven home when students shadow Custer during rounds with the HIV patients who comprise the bulk of her clinical practice. In addition to training them how to treat those patients, Custer also strives to make them understand how getting to know the patients as people will help improve health outcomes. “The better you get at understanding someone’s background, their surroundings and their culture, that helps you communicate and connect with them better,” she says. Those relationships are especially crucial for patients with limited medical resources. Influencing a student’s perception of and interaction with a patient is Custer’s ultimate goal. “I try to make it clear to them that we are preparing them for further independence by holding them responsible now.”
Julie Ann Justo
Clinical Practice Teaching Award
Assistant professor
College of Pharmacy

Julie Justo specializes in infectious diseases — learning how they work and how to best treat them. “I love puzzles, and infectious diseases are very much a puzzle,” says Justo, a board-certified pharmacotherapy specialist with added qualifications in infectious diseases. “You have the patient and you have their symptoms, but then you also have the bug, and you have to match the bug with the drug. There can be multiple right answers, but there’s normally one or two optimal answers. That space between what’s acceptable and what’s optimal is really the majority of what I do.” Justo puts her puzzle-solving passion to work in the classroom and at Palmetto Health Richland, where students who go on rounds with her have to be able to process a lot of information. “At this point in their careers, it’s less about the letter grade and more about, ‘Would you trust yourself to care for someone you love?’” Justo says. “You can be just an OK health care provider, but we’re trying to train health care providers that people seek.”
USC Education Foundation
Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award

USC’s Education Foundation considers nominations each year for two outstanding teaching/instructional graduate assistants: one in humanities, social sciences, education and related professional programs and one in science, math and related programs.
Caroline Dunn and Evelyn Chukwurah

USC Education Foundation
Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award

Caroline Dunn, a Ph.D. candidate in health promotion, education and behavior in the Arnold School of Public Health, has taught a 500-level course on human nutrition. The goal of the course is to follow an application of nutrition principles, including the function of foods and nutrients in health and disease prevention, throughout the life cycle. Dunn taught the course in a traditional classroom setting and worked with administrators and instructors in the department to take the course online, opening enrollment to students on other USC campuses.

Evelyn Chukwurah, a Ph.D. candidate in biological sciences in the College of Arts and Sciences, has taught an introductory course in molecular and cellular biology. Students in the course are taught how to think like molecular biologists and employ techniques to answer basic questions about how cells behave as they mature and respond to environmental stress. Chukwurah helps students relate to the course material by using examples from cooking, athletics and other everyday activities to explain broad concepts.
The Center for Teaching Excellence is the division of the Office of the Provost charged with fostering excellence and innovation in teaching. Now in our 10th year of operation, CTE believes that everyone has the power to become an exceptional teacher — tenured and tenure-track faculty, clinical faculty, adjunct faculty, and graduate teaching assistants alike. We provide programming, opportunities and resources that promote best teaching practices and cultivate pedagogical innovation among all who teach at the university.

We are proud to celebrate the outstanding teaching that happens every day at USC. And we are especially delighted to recognize the 2017 recipients of university teaching awards, who represent the best of the best among us. Please visit our website at sc.edu/cte to learn more about these faculty awardees and about the many programs and resources CTE offers: workshops, short courses, webinars, grant programs, learning communities, instructional design services and individual consultations. No matter where you are in your teaching career, we are here for you.

With sincere best wishes,

Aisha Haynes
Interim director, Center for Teaching Excellence