

# UW System, Alliant Energy: Recognize outstanding students, teachers for 2020

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MADISON, Wis.—Two University of Wisconsin System students and four teachers are being recognized today by the UW System and Alliant Energy Foundation for their outstanding achievements. The Alliant Energy/Erroll B. Davis, Jr. Achievement Award recognizes the outstanding academic and community-service efforts of students from traditionally underrepresented minority groups who are pursuing a degree in business or engineering at UW-Madison or UW-Platteville. The Alliant Energy James R. Underkofler Excellence in Teaching Award recognizes outstanding commitment to student success. The awards are presented to students and teachers from UW System campuses located within Alliant Energy's service area.

"We thank the Alliant Energy Foundation for continuing to generously support these awards," said UW System President Tommy Thompson. "With pride, we recognize these remarkable students and instructors whose impressive academic and volunteer achievements are helping even more students succeed."

"We are honored to continue the legacy of these awards to recognize the hard work of students and faculty," said Julie Bauer, Executive Director of the Alliant Energy Foundation. "These annual awards reflect Alliant Energy's long-standing investment in both education and our shared future."

The recipients of the 14<sup>th</sup> annual *Alliant Energy/Erroll B. Davis, Jr. Achievement Award* are:

- **Dalila Ricci, UW-Madison.** Ricci served as a construction intern for the Gilbane Building Company in New York City this past summer. A Chancellor

Merit Scholar and Leaders in Engineering Excellence and Diversity (LEED) Scholar, she tutors calculus for the Undergraduate Learning Center and has held various office positions for the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. She is the Global Connections associate director at the Wisconsin Union and the UW-Madison Senior Class Office events director. Ricci plans to graduate in May 2021 with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering.

- **Rkia Talbi, UW-Platteville.** Talbi, a Chancellor Scholar, interned at Boeing this past summer. She is past president of the Society of Women Engineers and involved in Pi Tau Sigma, an international honor society for mechanical engineers. As part of the Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) program at UW-Platteville, she mentors young women studying STEM fields. Talbi plans to graduate in December 2020 with a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering and a minor in French.

The 30<sup>th</sup> annual *Alliant Energy James R. Underkofler Excellence in Teaching Award* recipients are:

- **Ken Brosky, Associate Professor, College of Integrated Studies, UW-Whitewater at Rock County.** Prof. Brosky uses pedagogical research to hone his teaching skills, adjusting his courses to help students develop research and information literacy skills to become better writers. He encourages first-semester students to enter what he calls “teacher mode” – thinking about audience and purpose in a more critical way. His students have gone on to appear on the Dean’s List for their accomplishments and to win awards and essay contests. Brosky recently helped write a grant funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities to infuse the humanities into water-related science courses at UW-Whitewater campuses, emphasizing freshwater issues affecting southern Wisconsin. He was named the Beloit Rotary Teacher of the Month in the 2018-19 academic year and received the Gil Sedor Campus Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2016.
- **Kristina Fields, Professor, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, UW-Platteville.**

Dr. Fields teaches civil and environmental engineering courses with an emphasis in transportation. She created a study abroad civil engineering course, focusing on cycling infrastructure, with a university in the Netherlands. She teaches undergraduates how to use the roadway design software of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, which has helped students attain jobs there after

graduation. She is passionate about pre-college engineering outreach and was the curriculum manager for UW-Platteville's Sky's the Limit outreach program for young women. She is the faculty advisor for the Institute of Transportation Engineers UW-Platteville chapter and has chaired the City of Platteville Community Safe Routes Committee. Fields is an active member of the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Institute of Transportation Engineers, and the Center for Infrastructure Transformation and Education. She has earned campus awards in teaching, service learning, and advising, including the Excellence in International Advising Award in 2019.

- **Sharon Thoma, Faculty Associate, Department of Integrative Biology, UW-Madison.** Dr. Thoma's primary focus is teaching Biology 101, a large introductory biology course with 700 to 900 students per semester. To engage these biology majors and non-majors, Thoma transformed the class, shifting from only lecture and high-stakes exams to including additional assessment that builds on students' knowledge, using a variety of pedagogical tools. She works to make the classroom feel small by getting to know students, walking around the lecture hall to facilitate student interactions, and bringing natural items, such as plants and insects, for students to pass around during class. She encourages critical thinking and relates science to matters outside the classroom. Some students have decided to major in the biological sciences because of her enthusiasm for the field, personalized approach, and caring mentorship. She earned the Chancellor's Hildale Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2016, among other awards and honors.
- **Kristi Wilkum, Associate Professor, Department of Communication Studies, UW Oshkosh, Fond du Lac Campus.** Dr. Wilkum's teaching philosophy is to build on the strengths of each individual to enrich the community. She uses high-impact practices, including writing-intensive assignments, collaborative learning and new technologies, undergraduate research and community-based learning, and supervising internships. For the past five years, she has led an interdisciplinary research team developing a taxonomy of high-impact practices, work she has shared at national and regional peer-reviewed conferences. A first-generation college student herself, Wilkum mentored a student through the yearlong McNair Scholars program, which prepares low-income and underrepresented students for PhD work. In response to the global pandemic, Wilkum adjusted her public speaking course to encourage students to give virtual presentations on a variety of platforms,

including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Collaborate Ultra, and Flipgrid. She mentors Phi Theta Kappa honor society chapter members. In the community, she coaches TEDx Fond du Lac speakers and conducts leadership workshops.

## **About the Awards**

The Alliant Energy Foundation established an endowment in 2006 to honor Erroll B. Davis, Jr.'s distinguished record of public service. Davis, the first African-American leader of a "Business Week 1000" company, is a former chief executive of Alliant Energy and a former member of the UW System's Board of Regents. He was interim Superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools from 2012 to 2014.

The James R. Underkofler Excellence in Teaching Awards are given as a tribute to the energy company's long-time senior executive, James R. Underkofler (1923-2015), who was a staunch proponent of excellence in undergraduate teaching. He spent his entire career with the Wisconsin Power and Light Co. (now Alliant Energy), ending with his retirement in 1990 as chairman and CEO.

Both award programs are administered by the UW System's Office of Academic and Student Affairs. For more information about each of this year's recipients, see the [awards program online](#).