

McNeese State University

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CUTLINE: Six McNeese State University faculty members are recipients of the 2016 Pinnacle Excellence Awards established by Pinnacle Entertainment Inc. – the parent company of L’Auberge Casino Resort Lake Charles - to recognize the best teaching professor in each of the McNeese colleges—business, education, engineering and computer science, liberal arts, nursing and health professions and science. Pinnacle Entertainment Director of Public Relations Kerry Andersen and McNeese President Dr. Philip C. Williams presented the educators with their awards totaling \$30,000 during a ceremony held April 25 at McNeese’s Stream Alumni Center. From left to right are: Dr. W. Steve Thompson, College of Liberal Arts; Dr. Christos Douvris, College of Science; Katrina Carter, College of Nursing and Health Professions; Dr. Angelique M. Ogea, Burton College of Education; Dr. Jeff Stevens, College of Business; and Dr. Pankaj Chandra, College of Engineering and Computer Science. McNeese Photo

Six McNeese State University faculty members are recipients of the 2016 Pinnacle Excellence Awards established by Pinnacle Entertainment Inc. – the parent company of L’Auberge Casino Resort Lake Charles - to recognize outstanding faculty achievement in each of the McNeese colleges - business, education, engineering and computer science, liberal arts, nursing and health professions and science.

McNeese President Dr. Philip C. Williams and Pinnacle Entertainment Director of Public Relations Kerry Andersen presented the educators with their awards totaling \$30,000 during a ceremony held April 25 in McNeese’s Stream Alumni Center. Each winner received a \$5,000 stipend and a commemorative award statue.

The Pinnacle Excellence Awards were established in 2003 as part of a partnership between Pinnacle and McNeese to recognize outstanding faculty achievement and are granted by the Pinnacle Entertainment Foundation. To date, Pinnacle has given \$330,000 in awards to McNeese professors.

“More than a decade in to our partnership with McNeese State University, we are so proud to support and strengthen education initiatives in Southwest Louisiana. At a time when higher education is facing increased budget cuts, it’s gratifying to be able to work closely with our quality local university in support of exciting and fresh new learning opportunities for college students across our region. We congratulate the winners of this year’s Pinnacle Excellence Awards for their innovative ideas and their passion for education,” said L’Auberge Senior Vice President and General Manager Keith W. Henson.

“We deeply appreciate Pinnacle Entertainment for its ongoing commitment to McNeese, our professors and our community,” said Williams. “These awards recognize our faculty’s commitment to enhancing our students’ success. The focus of this year’s awards supports our Quality Enhancement Plan for improving faculty advising of our students as they progress through their degree program and prepare for careers after they graduate.”

Recipients and their proposals are:

College of Business - Dr. Jeff Stevens, assistant professor of management and entrepreneurship

Stevens' proposal – “Total Student Advising Program (TSAP)” - focuses on increasing student retention as well as student degree completion through an innovative advising program that focuses on the total student. Part of the focus is on creating a community of peer-supported advisers that combine with students to work together on total student concept. There are two critical aspects of this innovative program. First, faculty advisers will develop a total student program that goes beyond basic course assignments, which includes setting various types of goals related to personal, professional and academic objectives. A second aspect of TSAP will encompass a reflection discussion about the previous term.

Burton College of Education - Dr. Angelique M. Ogea, assistant professor of education professions

Ogea's proposal - “Eliminating Roadblocks for Students in the Department of Education Professions: Ensuring Student Progression by Offering Praxis Study Sessions”- will offer up-to-date Praxis study materials housed in Frazar Memorial Library as well as monthly study sessions for students seeking assistance in passing these required exams in order to enter an initial teacher licensure program and/or complete their education degree program through the Burton College of Education. Both of these resources will support student knowledge of content and formatting of the exams as well as eliminate the need for some students to withdraw from their education degree program due to issues with these exams.

College of Engineering and Computer Science - Dr. Pankaj Chandra, professor of mechanical engineering and head of the Department of Chemical, Civil and Mechanical Engineering

Chandra's proposal - “IMPROVE: An Approach to Enhance Advising and Retention” - will focus on creating a student handbook for freshman engineering students in the College of Engineering and Computer Science that includes all of the necessary resources available on campus and some guidelines for the day-to-day management of time, study habits and life-style challenges. Advising is not just confined to a few weeks each semester - it has a much broader scope and is a continuous tool to keep the students in school and on track to complete their degrees. This handbook will be a supporting document to advising as a part of the required course, ENGR 100 – Foundations for College of Engineering Freshmen.

College of Liberal Arts - Dr. W. Steve Thompson, assistant professor of criminal justice

Thompson's project - “Police Academy Certification” - will provide funds to purchase equipment and fund training necessary to sustain the McNeese Criminal Justice Academy Certification Program. Criminal justice students in this program graduate with a bachelor's degree and their certification as police officers and are ready for service with a law enforcement agency. This significantly increases their chances of obtaining

employment in the law enforcement field upon graduation. Supplying the equipment is a great incentive that can increase entrance and retention in the criminal justice program.

College of Nursing and Health Professions - Katrina Carter, assistant professor of nursing and assistant head of the Department of Nursing

Carter's project - "Collaborating and Implementing a Living-Learning Community for First-Year College of Nursing Students at McNeese State University" - will explore the feasibility of developing a living-learning community for nursing students at McNeese and promote engagement and involvement of current resident nursing students with nursing faculty as well as those students entering the clinical nursing course sequence. Specific mentoring activities will be developed to increase student engagement of first-year nursing students and those entering clinical nursing courses.

College of Science - Dr. Christos Douvris, assistant professor of chemistry

Douvris' proposal - "A Comprehensive Study for Retention Improvement in General Chemistry at McNeese State University" - will focus on identifying the challenges associated with the retention of students taking general chemistry and then planning strategies and tactics that could lead to retention improvements. General Chemistry - Chemistry 101 and Chemistry 102 - is currently one of the course sequences with the highest enrollment at McNeese. General chemistry is required by majors in the areas of science, education, nursing and engineering and this sequence acts as a foundation for upper level courses in these areas. It is critical that students obtain a strong educational foundation in these freshman-level courses and the overall objective of the study is to make positive contributions towards increasing the retention rates in Chemistry 101 and Chemistry 102.

