Richard & Eleanor Towner Prize for Outstanding Graduate Student Instructors
2019 Winners

Kristen "Nel" Escher
EECS 183

While teaching lab sections such as EECS 183, Nel created lessons that fostered strong engagement from students while achieving the learning outcomes of the lesson. This included a Mad Libs activity she created, which required students to practice issuing all the commands required to submit their final projects. Nel also used innovative ways to reach individuals in a class of almost a thousand students with diverse backgrounds. For example, EECS 183 uses ECoach software to reach students with tailored messages about their performance and resources available to them. Nel wrote messages through ECoach explaining the process and benefits of office hours, which allowed her to reach students who may not have known what to expect. Recognized by the EECS department as an outstanding Graduate Student Instructor in 2017, Nel has served as a role model to both students and peers.

Mary McMeekin
ME 250

In Mary's ME 250 classroom, she strove to create an environment that promoted positivity and collaboration in diverse settings. She gave constructive feedback to aid her students in their designs and helped produce plans for teams to implement this feedback. During her first semester as a GSI, Mary noticed common mistakes groups made in their designs that set them back and kept them from progressing in the course. She compiled a list of these mistakes and created a process in which each week prior to design review, she would present one issue from the past and talk about how to avoid it. This opened the floor for team discussion and taught students more about evaluating mechanical design. Mary's creativity and innovation inspired her students by reassuring them that their problems are solvable and showing them that what they're learning will be applicable in the future.

Tony Shin
NERS 535

As a GSI, Tony created new supplementary lecture/lab materials that have since been implemented into the NERS 535 curriculum. These additions allowed students to gain fundamental nuclear lab experience and helped the students learn new methods to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Noticing a "gap" between students of non-technical and technical backgrounds, Tony created lectures that reviewed data processing skills, with the focus on the fundamental concepts of programming rather than the programming language. This created a self-sustaining environment in which all students worked with each other more efficiently, as they had a common ground for discussing data processing strategies. Tony's standard for excellence in lab reports and exams helped push the students to perform their best work. He's now a graduate research fellow for the Consortium for Verification Technology.

Phillip Yang
BME 241 & 458

In the BME 241 and 458 lab courses that Phillip taught, he emphasized to his students the importance of design thinking throughout the months that they met. Instead of simply giving answers to his students, he led them to solutions in such a way that they benefitted greatly from the interaction. Phillip incorporated a variety of classroom assessment techniques during the term in order to gauge his students' understanding of the material. This allowed him to change his teaching style dynamically to fit the students' needs. In addition to his routine and expected duties as a GSI, Phillip took it upon himself to update and streamline the documentation associated with each of the laboratory modules within the couse. He always challenged his students to think beyond the core content taught in class, looking for problems in their daily lives that can be improved on with their newly acquired skills.