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The permanent title of Distinguished Teacher, a framed certificate, and a $1,000 monetary award are to be granted to the recipient of the University-Level Teaching Excellence Award (Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty). She will also receive recognition at the annual awards reception and May commencement ceremony.

**Teaching Excellence Award, tenured and tenure-track**

This award recognizes faculty who demonstrate outstanding teaching, high-quality classroom performance, innovation, and “commitment to student learning outcomes and inclusive excellence in education.”

**Kathleen A. Pericak-Spector**, professor, Department of Mathematics, is recognized for inspiring students throughout her academic career through “innovative educational opportunities, exciting outreach activities and expert classroom teaching,” according to a nomination letter written by Bhaskar Bhattacharya, professor and department chair. A close examination of Pericak-Spector’s work in her 36-year SIU Carbondale career “is that of an educator who is a living example of the very best characteristics of our profession and has inspired thousands of students.”

Pericak-Spector joined the university in 1981 as an assistant professor in Mathematics, became associate professor in 1987, and was promoted to professor in 1999. She is vice chair of the department. She was named a University Faculty Woman of Distinction in 1995 and received the Lindell W. Sturgis Professional Achievement Award in 1999.  Among other honors, she was recognized as the outstanding teacher in the College of Science in 1997 and 2011.

In her career, Pericak-Spector has been principal investigator on more than $3.25 million on external grants for innovative educational programs, including a National Science Foundation project designed to increase retention rates within the College of Engineering. Bhattacharya notes that first- and second-year retention rates within the College of Engineering increased by seven and nine percent, respectively, due in part to her efforts. She established the Math Learning Center in the College of Science study lounge in the James W. Neckers building; the study lounge consistently attracts 50 to 100 students nightly to receive additional tutoring help. She also has been instrumental in several outreach activities, including the “Expanding Your Horizons” program; chair of the Illinois Junior Academy of Science Region VIII Science Fair; the annual “Science in the South” conference for K-12 teachers; and the “Math Field Day”, which brings close to 1,000 high school students in the region to campus.

Pericak-Spector wrote that she loves math and teaching, cannot imagine doing anything else, and wants to make a difference in students’ lives. She wants students to see that “mathematics is not necessarily hard but it is thought-provoking.” Pericak-Spector strongly encourages students to ask questions and investigate for themselves – noting that a mathematics course “is comprised of helping students gain straightforward knowledge as well as equally develop a pattern of thinking about unsolved problems.”

Those who nominated Pericak-Spector also discuss her popularity as a classroom instructor and the waiting list of students who want to enroll in her courses. Tarnisha Green, director of Success in Engineering Through Excellence and Diversity at SIU, first met Pericak-Spector 20 years ago when Green was a student in her class. She wrote that Pericak-Spector has a “strong commitment” to students, and “regularly encourages other faculty to continue pursuing professional and personal opportunities to grow.” Green wrote she often tells others that if it weren’t for Pericak-Spector, she “may not have graduated with an engineering degree and it was her strong example of what a teacher is supposed to be that catapulted my desire to become a teacher.”

Former students who are now math instructors credit Pericak-Spector for their development, first as a student and now in their own respective careers.

Pericak-Spector earned bachelor’s degrees in mathematics and physics at State University of New York at Buffalo; a Master of Arts in mathematics from the University of Pittsburgh; a Master of Science in mathematics from Carnegie-Mellon University; and her doctorate, also in mathematics, from Carnegie-Mellon.

Pericak-Spector will receive the permanent title of Distinguished Teacher.