



UW System, Alliant Energy recognize outstanding students, teachers for 2018

MADISON, Wis. – Four University of Wisconsin System students and three teachers are being recognized today by the UW System and Alliant Energy Foundation for their outstanding achievements. The Alliant Energy/Erroll B. Davis, Jr. Academic 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/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.

“With the generous support of the Alliant Energy Foundation, we proudly recognize these outstanding students and instructors,” said UW System President Ray Cross. “Their remarkable academic and volunteer achievements inspire us all as we work to help more students develop their talents and full potential on the path to success.”

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

The recipients of the 12th annual *Alliant Energy/Erroll B. Davis, Jr. Academic Achievement Award* are:

- **Alli Abolarin**, senior, UW-Madison. Abolarin conducts research in neurodegenerative disorders and serves as a LEED (Leaders in Engineering Excellence and Diversity) Scholar to encourage underrepresented students in the field of engineering. In the nine-week Amgen Scholars Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he helped optimize the lab’s drug delivery system to treat bone defects. Abolarin expects to earn a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Engineering in May 2019, along with a Certificate in International Engineering.
- **Kolbi Lackey**, senior, UW-Platteville. Lackey contributes research on fluid dynamics as part of a student team studying a wind tunnel on campus. In her sophomore year, she was accepted into the United Marine Corp Officer Candidate School, which evaluates potential candidates for leading U.S. Marines. She would like to design, re-engineer, and improve aircraft in all sectors, including private, commercial, and military. Lackey expects to earn a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering in May 2019.
- **Coty Weathersby**, senior, UW-Madison. Weathersby participated in UW-Madison’s Engineering Summer Program for high school students, which introduced her to waste water treatment research. Later, as a LEED Scholar, she led an outreach visit to her alma mater, Rufus King High School. A founding member of the Wisconsin chapter of the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers, she coordinates outreach days through the Madison-area Boys and Girls Club. Weathersby expects to earn a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering in May 2019.

- **Jonathan Yancy**, senior, UW-Platteville. Yancy holds an associate degree from UW-Richland, where he was a residential advisor and campus ambassador. At UW-Platteville, he has volunteered for the campus Multicultural Office, the Dubuque Black Men Coalition, and Deere & Co., which invited disadvantaged children to campus to learn about college and career opportunities. Yancy served as assistant manager at Abercrombie & Fitch, Mall of America, Minn., and interned at Target Corporation in Dubuque, Iowa. He expects to earn a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with an emphasis in Finance/Management in December.

The 26th annual *Alliant Energy/Underkofler Excellence in Teaching Award* recipients are:

- **Paul Hooker**, Senior Lecturer, Chemistry, UW-Madison. Dr. Hooker has played a pivotal role in the Department of Chemistry's REACH initiative, which promotes active learning in the high-enrollment general chemistry courses. He helped identify new learning objectives for a sequence of general chemistry courses, affecting about 3,000 students each year. Hooker structures his courses to draw on higher-order learning skills and employs teaching techniques such as lecturing, group peer instruction, and the "flipped" classroom, in which he pre-records lectures and uses class time to apply concepts.
- **Valerie Murrenus Pilmaier**, Associate Professor of English, UW-Green Bay, Sheboygan Campus. Dr. Pilmaier has developed and taught a wide variety of literature, gender, sexuality, and women's studies courses, teaching both face-to-face and online. She uses evidence-based teaching strategies, including portfolios and personal reflections, to help students engage with course material. Pilmaier earned Teacher of the Year and a Distinguished Service Award and has twice been named a UW System Wisconsin Teaching Fellows and Scholars participant.
- **Muthu Venkateshwaran**, Assistant Professor, School of Agriculture, UW-Platteville. Dr. Venkateshwaran incorporates hands-on laboratories, simulations, team projects, instructional videos, field trips, and other teaching methods into his courses on plant breeding and pathology, pest identification and management, crop science, and others. He encourages undergraduate research as an inquiry-based, active learning experience. He is a respected mentor and advisor for students, and many of his students have gone on to pursue graduate studies or conduct industry research. He has earned the UW-Platteville Outstanding Faculty Award.

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 Underkofler 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 the 2018 recipients, see the [awards program online](#).

-END-

MEDIA CONTACT:

Heather LaRoi, UW System
608-265-3195, hlaroi@uwsa.edu
universityrelations@uwsa.edu