

Provost's Task Force on Celebrating Faculty Success

Introduction

In late Fall 2011, Florida Atlantic University's Provost Brenda Claiborne formed the Task Force on Celebrating Faculty Success ("the Task Force") to fulfill her goal of ensuring that faculty members are recognized for their most notable accomplishments in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service. Specifically, the Task Force was charged with the following tasks:

1. Exploring best practices for celebrating faculty successes at other institutions and subsequently conducting an assessment of FAU's current practices;
2. Creating a communication plan for sharing news of individual faculty achievements with Schools and Departments, the Colleges, and the Provost's Office, so that successes may be celebrated in a timely and appropriate fashion; and
3. Proposing specific changes to the Provost's website such that faculty accomplishments will be highlighted and easily accessible.

The Task Force, composed of faculty members nominated by Deans as well as representatives from the Office of the Provost, first met in December 2011 and gathered regularly over the course of the next three months. A complete list of members is available in Appendix A. The final report was submitted in March 2012.

In short, the Task Force recommends the following steps be taken to celebrate faculty success:

1. Establish and promote a self-reporting system such as the highlights@fau.edu tool that can be expanded to allow faculty members to visit a website and submit updates via a web form. Ideally, it would be useful to integrate a dynamic online system for annual evaluation reporting, recognition of excellence and awards, and a searchable database for funders, students, media, or other stakeholders to identify and contact professors who have demonstrated excellence in particular fields of research, teaching, and community engagement/service.
2. Review existing faculty awards – University-wide and within each College – to ensure that they are comprehensive and focus on the priorities of the university (e.g., awards for teams or units to promote collegial work and interdisciplinary teaching and research, awards for professors and instructors at different levels to ensure an even playing field). Whenever possible, financial rewards should be used to demonstrate appreciation for excellence. Meaningful awards may also include course-time release to conduct research, funding for conference travel, or purchases of work-related equipment and technology.
3. Expand on the multitude of techniques that the Colleges, Schools, and Departments are already using to celebrate faculty success. These units provide faculty members with

outlets to share their current research and teaching activities, which should be adopted institution-wide, such as “prime real estate” on the homepage, a scholarly symposium, or informal gatherings (all of which the Colleges do well in their own capacity).

4. Revise the Office of the Provost website to spotlight success. Create a comprehensive University-wide awards database that is also accessible at an easy-to-remember link like www.fau.edu/awards, which would list current award opportunities, faculty who have won noteworthy awards, and allow faculty members to self-nominate and nominate others for current award opportunities. Additionally the Provost’s website should feature a rotation of faculty achievements on its homepage in order to be a more welcoming resource guide for faculty members. Names of site sections should be clarified to reflect the true structure of the division.

These recommendations, which are fully expanded upon in a later section of this report, were compiled after first identifying what constitutes faculty success. Then, a study of best practices was undertaken as well as a self-evaluation of FAU, including current methods of celebrating faculty success and the challenges that may inhibit said celebrations. After assessing the results, the Task Force agreed upon the above recommendations.

Definition of Faculty Success

Following the Provost’s lead, the Task Force defines “faculty success” as the achievement of excellence in various fields of academic endeavor, including theory development, research and knowledge creation, scholarly and professional publications, conference and public presentations or exhibitions, teaching and knowledge transfer, course and curriculum innovation and enhancement, academic advising, mentoring students, service to the university and community, professional accomplishments, and community engagement. Faculty success may be viewed in terms of the individual successes of faculty members, as well as the successes of academic units and teams, partnerships within the university, and partnerships with the community.

Therefore, the “celebration of faculty success” refers to the formal and informal methods that the university uses to publicly acknowledge and demonstrate appreciation for the efforts and achievements of faculty members. The Task Force noted that highlighting a faculty member’s most notable accomplishments serves the following purposes:

1. Celebrating faculty success **acknowledges, recognizes, and shows appreciation** for faculty members, encouraging them to pursue excellence, develop professionally, and enjoy working in an environment that understands and values their work.
2. Celebrating faculty success **contributes to the mission of FAU**, encouraging faculty members to focus on endeavors that are valued by the university,
3. Celebrating faculty success promotes the institution locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, which **boosts public awareness** and expands opportunities for partnerships and financial support in its teaching, research, and community engagement.

The Task Force views each of these purposes as vital to FAU and does not see them as mutually exclusive. Rather, an engaged and positive faculty can ultimately attract high-achieving students to increase the overall quality of the institution – while also attracting donors and partners to sponsor teaching and research.

Best Practices

In order to assess the efficacy of FAU's current practices for celebrating success, the Task Force investigated the best practices of large public institutions rated as "very high research activity" by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. The Task Force reviewed this grouping because it includes only those large public institutions that have attained FAU's research aspirations as outlined in Goal II of the 2012-2017 Strategic Plan, which was approved by the FAU Board of Trustees' Strategic Planning Committee in February 2012 and will subsequently be forwarded to the full board for final adoption in March 2012. Each member of the Task Force then reviewed the websites of three aspirational peer institutions. Additionally, members discussed past experiences with other universities (including public, private, national, and international institutions) that might also inform the committee of best practices in the field.

It was quite apparent that numerous institutions have conducted comparable studies in the past, the most extensive of which appeared to be the State University of New York (SUNY). In 2004, the Provost of SUNY initiated a system-wide task force to make recommendations to improve retention through recognition and rewards and to improve overall faculty development efforts (<http://www.suny.edu/provost/publications/TaskForceReport.cfm>). Similarly, Indiana University-Bloomington established "faculty excellence" as one of its eight presidential initiatives, which rewarded excellence through raising the base salary and research support for distinguished professors, recruiting top researchers to mentor their peers, and awarding the President's Medal for Excellence (<http://www.iu.edu/initiatives/faculty-excellence.shtml>).

A number of FAU's aspirational peers' websites included the following best practices:

- Substantive extrinsic rewards for teaching, research, and service, including cash prizes
 - The SUNY Task Force recommends expanding current system or campus faculty recognition programs to the college and departmental levels (http://www.suny.edu/provost/publications/TaskForceReport.cfm#mean_rew)
- Online centralization of faculty news and awards updates in a prominent location
 - Florida State University lists major winners, including Nobel Laureates and National Academy of Sciences members (<http://fsu.edu/faculty/fachonors.html>)
 - The University of Toronto publicizes available awards for research and teaching on a searchable database (<http://www.research.utoronto.ca/award-honours>)
 - The SUNY Task Force recommends establishing an honors database to inform faculty of available awards and to identify SUNY faculty winners (http://www.suny.edu/provost/publications/TaskForceReport.cfm#build_awar)
- Routine communication among units, e.g., daily or weekly
 - Virginia Tech's Research division recognizes a faculty member as "scholar of the week" (<http://www.research.vt.edu/scholar-of-the-week>)
 - The University of California - Los Angeles provides homepage visitors with daily updates regarding faculty in headlines, features, and events (<http://www.ucla.edu>)

- Publications that spotlight research and innovation
 - North Carolina State University’s e-magazine *Transformational Faculty* acknowledges faculty members who have made global contributions (<http://www.ncsu.edu/faculty-and-staff/transformational-faculty>)
 - The University of Toronto publishes *The Edge*, a magazine that is distributed to faculty, students, and alumni (<http://www.research.utoronto.ca/edge>)
- Highlighting the link that faculty members have on society through the production of high-achieving students (dubbed “the ripple effect”)
 - Washington State University divides its homepage into three sections, e.g., learning, research, and community. The learning section focuses on how faculty research translates to student learning (<http://www.wsu.edu>)
 - The University of New Mexico set up a development campaign website, “Changing Worlds,” which focuses on how faculty research influences students, who then go on to have major societal impacts (<http://fromhereworldschange.net>)

Other peer institutions have entire units that handle not just the development of the faculty but the publicizing of individual accomplishments as well. This systemic approach views the celebration of faculty success as a process that is part of professionally developing faculty members. For example, North Carolina State University created the Office of Faculty Development, which reports to the Provost’s Office (<http://ofd.ncsu.edu>). This unit handles internal teaching awards, keeps the faculty informed of current development workshops and institutes, and coordinates “community engaged scholarship” to start mutually-beneficial relationships involving faculty, students, and private community members. The SUNY Task Force also recommended that senior faculty award winners should mentor junior faculty who are applying for awards. These types of proposals would accomplish multiple goals, such as a) clearly delegating the responsibility of recognizing notable faculty achievements and b) using a peer system to encourage faculty members to engage and develop one another.

Current Ways FAU Celebrates Faculty Success

At the University level, FAU celebrates the extraordinary achievements of its faculty in ways that are similar to its aspirational peer institutions. The following list is not exhaustive:

- **Tenure, promotion, annual evaluations, and merit pay** are vital institutional processes in which FAU celebrates faculty success. Each process is very meaningful to the ongoing careers and success of faculty members. Unfortunately, there has been little merit pay in recent years, which has a negative effect on morale. The lack of merit pay makes it all the more important to ensure that FAU finds meaningful ways to demonstrate that it values the work and success of its faculty members.
- **University-wide awards** are coordinated by the Office of the Provost (teaching, advising, and service awards), the Office of the President (leadership awards), the Division of Research (mentor/mentee program, scholar and researcher of the year), the Graduate College (graduate mentoring awards), and the Office of Alumni Relations (leadership awards). Most of these awards come with cash prizes of \$1,000 to \$2,000.

The majority of these honors are awarded at Honors Convocation, which is a 40-year-old program that recognizes excellence in teaching, research, service, and leadership. A complete list of University-wide awards is available in Appendix B.

- **The homepage** includes graphic headlines of broad University initiatives, a few of which are faculty success stories. Also featured on the homepage are press releases and links to podcasts, news sites, and the Division of Research webpage.
- **FAU Today**, a University-wide news site, is another source for academic and community service news. Most of the content on this page is updated weekly, with Faculty/Staff Highlights being updated monthly. A “featured expert” is also posted on this main page.
- **Faculty Spotlight videos**, or “Make Wave” videos, are linked directly off the homepage. They feature two-minute clips of faculty members describing their research activities.
- **Research@FAU** e-newsletter focuses on research and creative scholarship activities, listing grants and publications and highlighting specific faculty members for their work in these areas. It is distributed electronically on a semi-quarterly basis by the Division of Research. Additional content of this nature, including specific accomplishments, is available on the division’s web site and in its annual report.
- **Administrators provide recognition** of faculty success at a variety of forums, including meetings with the Board of Trustees, faculty members, students, community groups, and commencement ceremonies.

At the College and Department level, methods of celebration vary from unit to unit. While certain areas have administrators who are responsible for these tasks, this is not the case in all Colleges. Additionally, the organizational culture influences the types of recognition, making some units much more formal in their efforts than others. The following list encompasses some of the techniques that the Colleges use to celebrate the success of their faculty members:

- College-level awards, with cash prizes, in addition to the University-level awards
- Weekly newsletters or email blasts from Deans and Directors
- College homepage success stories
- Standardized individual webpages for faculty members
- Webpages for faculty members who are featured in the media
- Recognition on unit-level Facebook, Twitter, and other social media accounts.
- College-level or Campus-level awards ceremonies
- Display boards in the halls of the unit’s facilities, usually located in prominent spaces
- Research symposia or lecture series where faculty update their peers on their work
- Mentoring programs that recognize junior faculty and prepare them for continued success
- Informal celebrations, such as invitational dinners or brown-bag lunches
- Regular research roundtables at the Department or College levels
- Conference funding that celebrates current research and shares it with external colleagues

Challenges

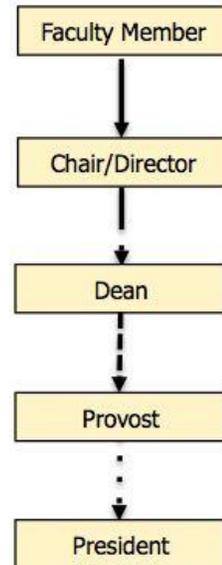
FAU faces particular challenges that its aspirational peers might not necessarily face. Geography can often act as a barrier for communicating the success of faculty members. The University operates using a distributed model, with seven campuses and specialized sites spanning over 100 miles of Florida's southeastern coast. Lack of coordination due to the multiple campuses often leads to isolation of units and loss of the opportunity to identify, share, and celebrate achievements. When compounded with the traditional, broken communication flow up the chain of command, similar to a game of "telephone," geographic and unit-based obstacles prohibit the news of faculty achievements from assuredly making it to higher-level administrators (see Figure 1). Additionally, the relative youth of FAU in comparison to some of its aspirational peers might lead to underdeveloped recognition programs and a lack of awareness on behalf of the faculty of the avenues that do exist to communicate faculty success.

As a large public institution, some challenges are inherent, such as disparities in resources among the Colleges and Departments. It may be easier to spotlight accomplishments in disciplines with better funding sources and sponsorships than in those with limited resources. Similarly, the units with lower budgets often have limited access to communications or public relations experts, information technology, and web design staff members who can expedite the spreading of good news. Technological advances have helped distribute information, but both departmental and central communications administrators are overloaded with information. Overall, the Task Force recognizes that resources are limited but notes that a uniform approach using current resources could resolve some of these conflicts. University fundraising and awards committees including community representatives could also be used to attract more donors (individuals, charitable foundations, and corporations) who might like their names attached to specific awards and examples of faculty excellence.

Other challenges are easier to identify and overcome. For example, recognizing teamwork in addition to individuals may lead to more success in units and could potentially mitigate competition that may divide faculty members and create conflict over perceptions of favoritism. Also, the humbleness of some faculty members who are not eager to be spotlighted could be resolved by a nomination process that does not require faculty members to seek out recognition. Most importantly, the lack of awareness of the techniques that FAU uses to identify and share faculty success can be overcome by strategic campaigns.

In its efforts to promote particular aspects of the FAU mission and goals, FAU must also be careful to support the principle of academic freedom. Accordingly, while recognition of success may include awards and other forms of celebration geared toward particular institutional goals, there should also be awards that are not directly tied to specific institutional goals. Recognition of success may include recognition of a broad range of approaches to research (qualitative, quantitative, historical, etc.), and teaching, as well as a broad range of topics and disciplines.

Figure 1. Current information flow of faculty achievements



Recommendations

As noted above, Colleges, Departments, and Schools have unique methods of celebrating faculty success. The Task Force encourages the University to expand upon what is already done well at the unit level, especially techniques that have little or no cost. While there are additional forms of recognizing accomplishments that are not yet done anywhere at FAU, many of the Task Force's recommendations revolve around improving upon the systems that already exist. Formalizing or expanding these systems will be necessary to adequately recognize faculty excellence.

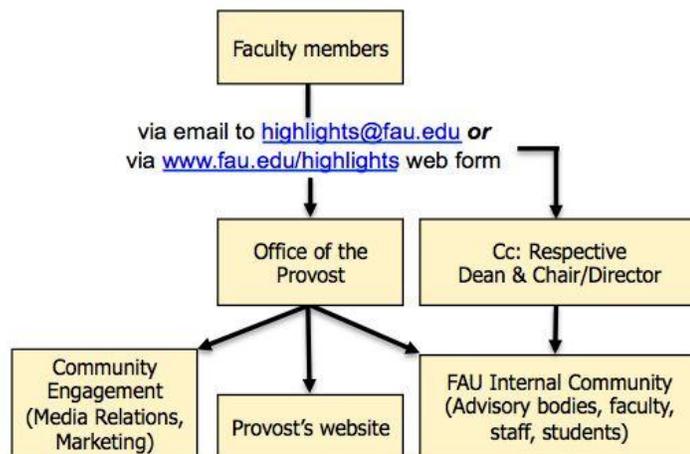
A great potential exists for additional research on the topic of celebrating faculty success. The Task Force encourages future studies that reach out to the faculty for further suggestions and help refine the recommendations contained in this report. An online survey, using a mechanism such as Survey Monkey, should be distributed to all faculty members to perhaps rate the findings of the Task Force or to offer additional insight.

First, the Task Force recommends a formalized, online system should be established to notify supervisors and peers of faculty achievements. The technical logistics of this online system have yet to be determined, but members of the Task Force feel that the self-reporting of extraordinary achievements by faculty members currently belongs in the annual evaluation system. If all faculty members submitted their annual evaluation materials online, FAU could create a dynamic, online database that could be used to track and identify examples of excellence (including research, publications, teaching innovations, knowledge transfer, and community engagement).

A more immediate solution would be to use the highlights@fau.edu email address. This tool is already available to faculty members who wish to submit updates about themselves and their work to the faculty highlights section of *FAU Today*, the University's online news publication. The email address should be marketed to faculty members. The process should also be expanded to include an online web form where faculty members can regularly update the Provost's Office, administrators and

appropriate University-wide parties of their current research and teaching activities (as seen in Figure 2). Form submissions would flow into the highlights@fau.edu email account, copying Deans and Directors. This information should then be used across multiple platforms, including the FAU homepage, press releases, and other announcements to the community.

Figure 2. Recommended information flow of faculty achievements



The Task Force stresses that, regardless of the kind of media that is used to celebrate faculty success, the updates should come *routinely* and *frequently*. It was quite apparent in the literature

review of aspirational peers that the most successful institutions did not limit their celebrations to annual major events. Instead, celebrations should occur regularly, allowing multiple faculty members and their work to be featured every month, if not more often. The frequency of these celebrations should engage faculty members and encourage them to continue to succeed.

Second, existing faculty awards should be reviewed at the University and College levels to verify that current awards are appropriately contributing to the mission and strategic plan of the institution. There are opportunities to recognize faculty members that are being overlooked but would fall in line with FAU's values. A few such opportunities are discussed below.

For example, the University could establish a select group of "distinguished" assistant professors, which could come with a monetary incentive or a title alone. These elite junior faculty members could use the chair to support them in their research endeavors. Additionally, they may be more successful in their application for external support and awards, as individuals who have been recognized internally may appear more appealing to external parties.

In addition, the Task Force believes the current offerings of awards at the University are lacking team honors. FAU recognizes its faculty for research, teaching, advising, and service. At times, the competition for these awards, albeit a healthy way to energize applicants, can create a less than collegial environment. The University should add a team award to its list of honors, incentivizing faculty members to work together on a variety of types of projects.

Awards can also be given to recognize a number of other contributions that faculty members make, including interdisciplinary teaching and research. Honors should be aligned fairly; instructors are not represented at the annual Honors Convocation. Understandably, these recommendations may seem expensive. Instead of awarding high-priced cash prizes, creative techniques such as time releases from course loads, subsidies for travel, or financial support for faculty work are all meaningful rewards. At the same time, they represent cost savings when compared to the multiple-thousand-dollar awards available at aspirational peer institutions.

The Task Force understands the ongoing fiscal constraints of higher education in Florida and across the nation; however, financial rewards are an effective form of celebrating faculty success and should be pursued whenever possible. In nearly every instance in which the Task Force contacted faculty members, across the Colleges, the response was very similar: if at all possible, please award cash prizes to those faculty members who excel in teaching, research, and service. If financial rewards are not available, the Task Force recommends innovative cost-effective methods of celebrating faculty success, a number of which could easily be accomplished.

Specifically, high-achieving faculty members could be spotlighted on the jumbo-screen at home football games. Faculty members could also be featured on the recordings played on the campus phone system when callers are placed on hold. While faculty members are featured in video spotlights and embedded in the FAU Today website, new programs could be established to similarly highlight individuals and their work. An "eWall of Fame" could be established if a physical Wall of Fame cannot be created in display cases in the Administration Building. Further surveying of faculty members could result in a number of cost-effective ways to recognize outstanding accomplishments.

Third, the celebration methods that are already being used at the College, School, and Department levels should be expanded. Their websites oftentimes feature faculty members (again, updated *routinely* and *frequently*) directly on the front page. As such, a “scholar of the week” should be highlighted on the University’s homepage, in addition to the video spotlights and headline stories that currently exist. Again, these forms of celebrations often take place at the College level but can and should be duplicated at the institutional level. Other proven techniques exist within the units, including formal awards dinners – but the most important takeaway from these units is that celebrating faculty success can be quite effective using a bottom-up process. Establishing informal research symposia or brown-bag lunches with a select group of faculty members happens naturally at the College or Department level. Faculty members should have routine, easy access to their University leaders, and the interactions need not always be so structured. Merely by reviewing the list of activities that these units complete to celebrate faculty success, senior administrators can better engage faculty members and share their stories.

The fourth and final recommendation of the Task Force is to overhaul the Provost’s Office website in a manner that celebrates faculty success. This can be accomplished by streaming the content available elsewhere on the FAU website to the homepage, spotlighting individual faculty members on a regular basis. After information has been gathered using one of the tools mentioned in the first recommendation, a comprehensive University-wide awards database should be established at a website such as www.fau.edu/awards. The Provost’s Office website should link to this informational and transactional database, where faculty members can go to explore current internal and external *award opportunities*. It should also allow faculty members to be able to share information regarding recent external and internal awards that they may have won, ultimately contributing to *an exhaustive list of faculty members who have won noteworthy awards* that will be available to FAU community members (both internal and public) who access this database. Ideally, the Task Force recommends that this “one-stop-shop” for faculty members also permit faculty members *to nominate themselves or others for University-wide awards*. Although self and peer-nominations are appropriate for some awards, other awards could include nominations by students, community representatives, or others.

Also, there are numerous valuable resources available on the Provost’s Office website that are too embedded, only available by clicking link after link. These information reservoir-type sections should be more clearly named, as it is hard to differentiate between “Faculty Information” (personnel forms), “Academic Information” (generic links), and “New Faculty Information” (orientation materials). In general, this website should be more welcoming. For example, a letter from the Provost and clearer links on the main navigation panel could greatly assist with these matters.

Perhaps the most important question to be asked of these recommendations is *what is the cost?* In fact, the majority of these recommendations can be implemented with little or no additional resources beyond administrative work hours. The Offices of Information Technology and Media Relations, as well as the Marketing Department, may receive more news updates from faculty members that could be shared in the manners outlined above, but the budgetary impact is largely insignificant. This Task Force acknowledged the lack of funding available for this project and subsequently intended to only recommend minimal line-item costs.

Conclusion

The celebration of faculty success at FAU can be improved upon in a number of ways. After reviewing the best practices of very-high-research aspirational peers and assessing the University's own techniques at the organization-wide and unit levels, the Task Force recommends that a number of measures be taken to promote and improve current practices. By centralizing the way that faculty members communicate their most noteworthy accomplishments, FAU will be able to recreate on the macro level what it already does well on the micro level. The Task Force recognizes the continued efforts of the institution's various units and moves that the University take advantage of the resources that are spread throughout the organization.

Appendix A. Task Force Members

- Allan Barsky, College for Design and Social Inquiry
- James Capp, Office of the Provost
- Eric Chiang, College of Business
- Janet Cramer, Office of the Provost
- Ali Danesh, College of Education
- Julie Earles, Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College
- Marcella Munson, Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters
- Markus Schmidmeier, Charles E. Schmidt College of Science
- Khaled Sobhan, College of Engineering and Computer Science
- Christine Williams, Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing

Appendix B. Faculty Awards

Distinguished Teacher of the Year

Since 1969, the Distinguished Teacher of the Year has been awarded annually to one FAU faculty member on the basis of scholarship, research and publications, classroom teaching, academic counseling, and University and community service. The award winner is determined by students. The recipient receives a cash award and delivers the keynote address at Honors Convocation in the Spring and Freshman Convocation in the Fall. Nominations are made by students in January; each College's Student Advisory Committee selects the finalist from its College. One DTOY winner is then selected from among the nine finalists by the University Student Advisory Committee in spring, on the basis of his or her portfolio and in-person interview. For more information on how to nominate, visit <http://www.fau.edu/provost/dtoy.php>.

Excellence and Innovation in Teaching and Advising Awards

Deadline for submitting applications and nominations is early February. Finalists to Provost's office by early March. University Faculty Senate Honors and Awards Committee makes final selections by late March. 8 teaching and 3 advising awards given for "enhancing undergraduate instruction and advising." \$2,000 stipend each. Awarded at the Honors Convocation ceremony in April. For more information on how to nominate, consult Section II of the [Call for Nominations](#).

Other University Awards

Name of Award	Office	When Awarded	Contact
Degree of Difference	Alumni Office	Honors Convocation	Brad Crews
Excellence in Graduate Mentoring	Graduate College	Graduate Reception	Paige Garrido
Honorary Doctorate	President's Office	Commencement	Andrew LaPlant
Research Mentor & Mentee	Division of Research	Special Reception	Camille Coley
President Medallion	President's Office	Commencement	Andrew LaPlant
Presidential Leadership	Equal Opportunity	Service Awards	Ed Rowe
Researchers/Scholars of the Year	Division of Research	Honors Convocation	Camille Coley
Talon Award	Alumni Office	Fall Talon Awards	Brad Crews
TIAA-CREF Awards	Academic Affairs	Service Awards	James Capp

Please note: Nominations are gathered through a variety of means. Some are gathered through applications, some are through open nominations, and some are only acquired through Dean, Director, VP, or Presidential nomination. Additionally, certain awards are not annual in nature and are only awarded to recognize extraordinary service. Please contact the award coordinator listed for more information.