

Chico State Recognizes 2021–22 Outstanding Faculty

Neesa Sonoquie | December 12, 2025



Eight California State University, Chico faculty members have been recently recognized with 2021–22 Outstanding Faculty Awards, selected by the University's Faculty Recognition and Support Committee.

These awards—among the highest at Chico State—celebrate faculty excellence in the categories of Outstanding Professor, Teacher, Academic Advisor, Research Mentor, Faculty Service, Lecturer, Lecturer in Bringing the Profession to the Classroom, and Early Career Faculty.

Every one of these recipients learned they were being recognized during surprise visits this spring from Chico State President Gayle Hutchinson, her Cabinet, and colleagues within their respective colleges.

"These outstanding award recipients exemplify our University commitments to transformative experiences, academic distinction, and prominent scholarship and innovation," Hutchinson said. "Their work provides inspiration and influences the lives of thousands of students through teaching, scholarly and creative activities, and service. I congratulate the awardees and thank them for helping to establish Chico State as a preeminent university."

Outstanding Faculty Service Award

Hannah Burdette

Hannah Burdette is a fierce and devoted advocate who has played a significant role in helping the University think critically about who has been denied a place at the

table, what it means to be a Hispanic-Serving Institution, our collective responsibility to ensure that no we do no harm, and the importance of our "sense of place" given our location on traditional Mechoopda lands.

Through her many and varied contributions, Burdette has supported and uplifted our most vulnerable students and has stimulated conversations, self-reflection, and engagement around issues of racial and social justice, diversity, and equity, both among students and the larger campus community. This is difficult and oftentimes invisible work, yet since her arrival in Chico six years ago, Burdette has consistently managed an incredible service load on top of being an incredibly active scholar.



Burdette is a founding member of the Friends of the Mechoopda, an organization that has worked to increase the representation of Native faculty and staff on campus and to develop scholarship opportunities for Native students. As a member of the Humanities Center Advisory Board, Burdette has assisted with diversifying the topics and presenters for the Humanities Center Lecture Series, and reinvigorating and recreating the relevance of the humanities. In 2021-2022, all invited speakers are women and/or faculty of color. She has also organized the campus visits of several Latin Americanists and three Indigenous-language hip-hop musicians who performed, visited classes, and shared lunch with students to talk about hip-hop as a global language of resistance.

One of her favorite memories is from October 2016, her second year at Chico State, when she brought a trilingual Mixtec rapper and a Zapotec DJ to campus for an artists' talk and performance. Una Isu came from a family of farmworkers and raps about his Chicano and indigenous identity, and she recalls how rewarding it was to see how much students related to his story and saw their own families' experiences reflected in his music.

"Everything I do as a professor, from my research and teaching to various service commitments, is driven by a

passion for equity and social justice—particularly indigenous, immigrant, and LGBTQ rights,” she said, “I also enjoy teaching materials that push students to think about how cultural narratives shape the way we view the world around us. Some of the most fruitful discussions in my classes have taken place when students shared their own experiences of cognitive crisis, as we discussed topics—such as the legacy of Christopher Columbus, U.S. intervention in Latin America, or political debates over immigration policy—that challenge their previous conceptions and push them to think differently about their own place in the world.”

Burdette is an associate professor of Spanish and Latin American studies in the Department of Languages and Cultures. She also serves as Spanish advisor, Coordinator of Spanish, is founder and advisor of the Spanish Club, and mentors graduate teaching associates from the master’s program in language teaching. In 2019, she published her first scholarly monograph, *Revealing Rebellion in Abiyala: The Insurgent Poetics of Contemporary Indigenous Literature* with the University of Arizona Press.

Outstanding Research Mentor Award

Shane Mayor

The word mentor was made for people like Shane Mayor. Since his start at Chico State more than 10 years ago, Mayor has enthusiastically supported undergraduate and graduate students from differing backgrounds and majors, generously devoting his time, energy, and expertise to guide them in various atmospheric lidar projects with a constant flow of encouragement and trust, and the freedom to learn and grow as researchers in their own right. Many of these students are historically underserved in STEM fields, including those who are first-generation, low-income, female, or students of color.

Mayor is a creative and dedicated researcher known for his big heart, sense of humor, and for putting his students’ success first. He is lauded for his ability to explain difficult concepts in a minimally technical way, his willingness to provide swift guidance in whatever areas are needed, and the independence with which he allows students to self-motivate, make their own decisions, and learn from their mistakes. Mayor’s students are a diverse group, coming from not only the geological and environmental sciences department, but mechanical engineering, computer science, physics, and electrical engineering, and he consistently offers these students prized opportunities to develop vital professional skills and advance their scientific knowledge, helping guide them into becoming confident and capable scientists.



He has conducted frontier research projects with students year-round and co-authored with them in numerous publications, with rare attention to the professional development of undergraduate researchers. His unique, integrative approach offers students the chance to collaborate with their peers, faculty, and professional scientists and technicians from a variety of disciplines, and he makes sure to highlight the value of his students’ work within the earth and environmental science community, supporting the development of their own science identity and sense of belonging.

He shares that when he was an undergrad, he strongly preferred extracurricular research activities to coursework. Today, he credits a large amount of his professional growth to internships under the supervision of great mentors and now strives to work with students like those mentors worked with him.

“I don’t invite students to perform research in response to some top-down driven engagement program,” he said. “I *depend* on students to do the work that satisfies my grants and contracts. It’s serious work and I know that many students are just as capable of producing great results as more experienced professionals.”

Mayor holds both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in meteorology and a PhD in atmospheric and oceanic sciences from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He was post-doctoral fellow in the Advanced Studies Program of the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) and an atmospheric scientist in NCAR’s Earth Observing Laboratory (EOL) before coming to Chico in 2008. Mayor is currently an associate professor in the Earth and Environmental Sciences Department.

Outstanding Lecturer Award

Ana Medic

The word “outstanding” seems an understatement in describing Ana Medic.

She is a brilliant teacher, community organizer, and research mentor whose scholarship, service, and impact on student success falls within and far beyond her assigned responsibilities as a faculty lecturer. Medic, fluent in Serbian, Spanish, and English, is starting her 10th year at Chico State, and in that time, she has taught nine classes across three colleges on campus (Agriculture, Natural Sciences, and Engineering, Computer Science and Construction Management). She has led international research trips, served as an Academic Senate officer and as member and advisor of numerous University committees and clubs, and published peer-reviewed scholarly research with students as co-authors.

Medic puts her heart and soul in all she becomes involved in. She is known for her kindness, empathy, and clear, effective teaching style, and for sharing with students the joys and triumphs of learning by paying constant attention to their interests and tailoring her content to make it relevant to the concerns and career goals of each class. She offers endless support, resources, and information about relevant jobs and internships to ensure student success after graduation.



Being in a discipline with very few women faculty, she has been a guiding light for women who have chosen to pursue crop and soil science. In addition to her exceptional work in the classroom, service to the University, and scholarly research pursuits, Medic is a founding member and continuing advisor to Womxn of Agriculture (WOA), a campus club that brings together womxn and womxn supporters to further support their advancement within the agricultural industry.

Medic is also faculty advisor to Sustainable Engineering and Environmental Health for Development (SEEHD), a campus club that focuses on tackling environmental engineering and health problems such as water and wastewater treatment in developing countries. In 2019, Medic led SEEHD members on a transformative and impactful project in Central America to help communities tackle problems of clean drinking water and sanitation.

"I find motivation to do things I love through connection with students and faculty, being able to help students achieve their educational goals, but at the same time get to know them, encourage beyond the classroom, and see what their future holds," she said. "In the past, I have worked with several students on research, supported their work we presented at national and international conferences, supported a few students' clubs as a faculty adviser, and encouraged some to seek further higher education. It is a unique feeling knowing you are helping them achieve more than what they have dreamed of. My quote to them is 'Believe in yourself and pay it forward!' hoping that one day a small change can make a big difference."

Medic holds a bachelor's degree in biology and environmental protection and a master's degree in ecology and environmental protection from the University of Belgrade, and a master's degree in environmental sciences from Chico State.

Outstanding Teacher Award

Char Moffit

Char Moffit is a true educator with a hunger for improving the primary education system, and she sets a superior example of how a professor should take the time to build authentic relationships with their students. She understands that new teachers have busy lives filled with unique challenges, and her humanity makes it easier for her students to learn, to enjoy coming to class, and to have the confidence to fulfill the demanding requirements of the credential program.

Moffit is known for being down to earth and putting her whole heart into her work. She mentors and motivates with unconditional kindness and wisdom, attending to both the academic and socio-emotional needs of her students while creating innovative curriculum that teaches authentic material pertinent to real-life classroom teaching. As a professor, she is passionate about literacy and teaching, and she works tirelessly to help aspiring and new teachers hone their craft and remain curious and engaged in the process.



Known affectionately as “Dr. O” by his students, Vincent Ornelas has guided undergraduate students to great things in the field of social work, both locally and across the nation, with a combination of patience, kindness, and grit. The Bachelor of Social Work degree program (BSW) has evolved and improved in many ways under his care, most notably with a marked increase in nontraditional students and more students of color within the department. Ornelas, who is Latino and bicultural, has been a pillar of support and advocacy for these students, and a model of social justice in a profession where many clients speak other languages and come from different cultures.

Her office door is always open—when morale is low, she is there to provide a listening ear, honest advice, a children's book, or constructive feedback. Without fail, Moffit's students feel heard, supported, encouraged, and understood.

Amidst the devastating educational challenges of the pandemic, Moffit was able to foster a warm and comfortable environment. Despite their impersonal virtual setting, she created a space where students could bond, interact, learn content, apply knowledge, and connect in a genuine way. Moffit also participates in professional development on a regular basis to keep current in teaching methods and strategies, and to improve her own methodology and try new means of engaging students in fresh and creative ways.

“Every day I have the opportunity to make the world a better place by teaching individuals who want to be elementary classroom teachers. Each choice I make as a teacher matters, as I am modeling how to be a successful teacher in everything I say and do,” she said. “I model the importance of being available and taking the time to build relationships with each of my students by learning about who they are and what motivates them as learners and future teachers. Then, I give them time to get to know each other and build relationships as we construct our learning together.”

Moffit holds a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Nevada, Reno; a Certificate in Elementary Education from Sierra Nevada University; and a master's degree in educational leadership and a PhD in curriculum and leadership from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She has been an assistant professor in the School of Education since 2017.

Outstanding Academic Advisor Award

Vincent Ornelas

In addition to teaching, advising, and administrating the BSW program, Ornelas has served as the advisor for dozens of honors projects, and almost every semester he has volunteered to serve as the field instructor for students lacking an internship supervisor. Additionally, he has dedicated himself to building links between the School of Social Work, other campus units, and community-based organizations that target underserved populations in the region. These efforts have allowed students to complete internships in agencies serving especially vulnerable clients such as migrants and the unhoused. Ornelas also performs outreach for the program, connecting to neighboring community colleges and meeting with potential transfer students, guiding them through the labyrinth of graduation requirements toward timely completion of their degree.



Ornelas has fulfilled the high demands of serving as BSW program director and the perpetual list of other tasks and committees he participates in while enduring the loss of most of his hearing and managing significant health challenges. He has found ways to adapt his teaching and advising to remain a constant in the lives of his students, most of whom are not even aware of his struggles.

His motivation all resonates back to an experience he had in high school, when he realized he had never been seen as a candidate for college—or really prepared for what it

would entail. But with guidance from an incredible academic advisor he met by coincidence, he was able to chart his own course and access the resources to attend the college of his dreams on a merit-based scholarship.

“Today I see students who are looking for their own chance to fulfill a goal and make a difference for their family and for their community,” he said. “I work hard at what I do because it made all the difference in the world to have a key person in my life at the right time with the right advising and I want to provide that same opportunity to all of the students I see today.”

Ornelas holds a bachelor’s degree in history from Pitzer College, and an MSW in community organization, planning, and administration, and a PhD in social work from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. He has been the BSW program director at Chico State for more than 10 years.

Outstanding Professor Award

Tal Slemrod

Tal Slemrod is known campuswide as an engaged and creative instructor, a wonderful colleague, and a thoughtful and proactive researcher with a focus on creating a better world and more equitable schools for underserved children and their teachers. With an eye toward collaboration and community, there are never too many people at Slemrod’s table in his efforts to increase access and inclusion within the educational system.

Slemrod models the kind of teacher his students hope to become—he advocates for those in need and never hesitates to step in. He cares deeply for his students and listens with empathy, he promotes and maintains a safe and nurturing learning environment, and he believes firmly in every child’s ability to learn. His students know him as approachable and supportive, a pillar of encouragement always willing to ease the weight of the world in any way he can.



Slemrod’s influence reaches far beyond the classroom. He has secured funding to develop three noteworthy projects that have widespread benefit to students, the University, and the region. First, he has curated a collection of educational tools known as an “Assistive Technology Library” that can be used in specific ways to support special needs children in the K–12 schools. Second, in response to the increase in distance learning after the Camp Fire and the COVID-19 pandemic, Slemrod has converted an RV into an “Assistive Technology Mobile Classroom” and equipped it with technology to provide lessons, share professional development for teachers, and to serve the specific needs of various school sites. Lastly, Slemrod developed a 12-unit certificate program in educational technology and distance learning to be offered through Regional & Continuing Education (RCE) in an effort to aid educators in the transition to online teaching and learning.

“When I teach, I want my students to be excited about learning. My goal is to teach and engage future and current teachers in the implementation of effective practices—not only for their and their students’ academic success, but also for mental and physical health—especially during these challenging times,” he said. “I connect my research to teaching and expand the implementation of intervention and evidence-based practices. An intervention is only as good as its ability to be used, and to see students make those connections in practice is incredibly rewarding.”

Slemrod earned a bachelor’s degree in environmental and science policy from Clark University; a secondary biology teaching credential from Rockford College; a master’s degree in environmental science from California State University, Fullerton; and a PhD in special education from the University of Washington. Slemrod is associate professor in the School of Education at Chico State and coordinator of the Educational Technology and Distant Learning Program.

Outstanding Lecturer in Bringing the Profession to the Classroom Award

Quinn Winchell

Quinn Winchell is the kind of professor that bridges the divide between the classroom and “the real world,” giving students the applied experience that they crave. He speaks from a background rich in theory and practice, and makes it his mission to ensure that his students have a full film-making experience in his classes, which means academic research, extensive preparation and training, access to clients, and remarkable finished products. Whether he is donating his time on weekends, utilizing

his professional network, or making sure students have access to top-of-the-line equipment, Winchell consistently goes above and beyond as an advocate for hands-on learning.

In addition to lecturing in the Comparative Religion and Humanities Department and the Media Arts, Design, and Technology Department, Winchell has been involved with the Media, Entertainment and Technology Experience (METX) interdisciplinary program at Chico State since its beginning, providing direction and mentorship for students to produce industry-quality work in a collaborative, professional environment.



One of Winchell's most amazing efforts was a collaboration with one of his classes to produce the documentary *The Uncertainty of Shelter*, a close look into the lives of students facing homelessness, which aired on PBS in 2020. The project gave students an invaluable, comprehensive experience in film-making that required intensive research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and heart.

Winchell also reaches out to regional partners like Klean Kanteen and Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. to set up meaningful video experiences for students by giving them the opportunity to work with real clients. This is the type of learning that brings the profession to the classroom and extends the classroom into professional settings, preparing students to be better equipped to produce skilled videos for future high-profile clients after graduation.

"The film industry is not a stagnant environment, so I constantly have to keep my practices updated, while still adhering to the fundamentals of storytelling and film/video production. I always tell my students that they need to learn the rules before they can break them in inventive ways," he said. "Luckily, our University is filled with energetic and creative students who want to learn the history of film, understand how reoccurring narratives and representation change, and how they can produce

professional content that tells their stories. As an educator, my passion for this line of work is never hidden, and I think that students pick up on this quickly. Sometimes we get thrown curveballs that require us to think on our feet, but these are teachable moments that make the students well prepared when their professional careers begin."

Winchell holds a bachelor's degree in communication design from Chico State and a master's degree in directing from the Academy of Art University, San Francisco. He is a freelance videographer of both documentary and film, and has been teaching at Chico State since 2014.

Outstanding Early Career Faculty Award

Kun Zhang

Kun Zhang is a dedicated, creative, and brilliant teacher and scholar who has accomplished an astounding amount in service of his students, his colleagues, and the Civil Engineering Department at Chico State. He has published 13 peer-reviewed journal articles since joining the University in 2018, taught many different lower and upper-division courses, and spent a lot of effort in developing new and online courses for the department. Zhang has also amassed over \$150,000 in funded research at Chico State and, along with professor Jinsong Zhang, was awarded the prestigious Lantis Endowed University Chair in 2020 to advance their research in sustainable road maintenance and enhance learning through student-centered projects.

Zhang is revered by his students for creating a safe and interesting learning space, and for his ability to present technical content concisely, clearly, and with patience. Zhang puts students first—when he realized many of his students weren't taking or passing the critical Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) exam, the first step for licensure as a civil engineer, he created an online review course for the exam and made it available for free to students. The course has over 12 hours of videos on various topics within civil engineering and strategies for passing the exam. Student feedback has been extremely positive, with many citing the course as their reason for passing the FE.



Zhang is also a skilled researcher. His main area of focus is on using eco-friendly, innovative techniques in pavement engineering, like integrating waste cooking oil and olive pomace in asphalt to make them more sustainable. Zhang's work aligns with Chico State's mission as a leader in sustainability and engages students in local community service by connecting with local public works

California State University, Chico

400 West First Street

Chico, CA 95929

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