3 faculty named new President's Professors

Honor recognizes their work in the classroom and their scholarly work in infectious disease, complex data communication and electron microscopy

By Penny Walker, ASU News
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Three Arizona State University faculty members have been named President’s Professor, one of the university’s top faculty honors.

Shelley Haydel and Michael Treacy of The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Claire Lauer of the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts were inducted in a September ceremony.

“Knowledge is advancing at an unprecedented rate, and the importance of faculty who can keep pace and contribute as innovative educators and researchers has never been greater,” ASU President Michael M. Crow said. “This year’s President’s Professors exemplify leading-edge thinking and discovery balanced with creative teaching that prepares our students and communities for service and success.”

The designation, one of the most prestigious faculty honors, honors faculty members' innovation in the classroom and their scholarly contributions. The honor has been bestowed annually since 2006.

“Teaching and learning can create powerful moments of human experience,” said Nancy Gonzales, executive vice president and university provost. “Shelley Haydel, Claire Lauer and Michael Treacy exemplify those across our faculty who have mastered teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level. They have pushed boundaries for how we reach students through quality instruction and mentorship. That is an extraordinary contribution, and it deserves to be celebrated.”

Learn more about these professors and their work below.

New tests, treatments for hard-to-treat infections

(Video: {https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dN08BrfQ8ME})

Shelley Haydel is a professor and infectious disease microbiologist in the School of Life Sciences. Her research examines how tuberculosis, MRSA and other antibiotic-resistant bacteria cause

disease and seeks new ways to diagnose and treat infections. She also collaborates with engineers and chemists on rapid antibiotic susceptibility tests and antimicrobial sealants that could help prevent wound infections.

“At ASU, I get to focus on my ‘why.’ I get to understand how and why tiny infectious bacteria make us sick and can kill us, develop new treatments for infections and develop diagnostics that can tell which antibiotic will work in minutes or days instead of weeks or months,” Haydel said.

“I also get to teach and impact the next generation of microbiologists, scientists and health care professionals and witness their successes. As a first-generation college graduate, there is no way to measure what it means to have this work recognized with the ASU President’s Professor distinction.”

Haydel has also expanded hands-on research opportunities for undergraduate students.

“Shelley Haydel is the absolute embodiment of what a President’s Professor should be. She has made impressive and significant contributions in all three areas of research, instruction and service,” said Nancy Manley, director of the School of Life Sciences. “She is a true ‘triple threat,’ and I can think of no one more deserving of this honor.”

Making complex data useful in the real world

(Video: {https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPii3AcoTXg})

Claire Lauer, a President’s Professor in the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts, has spent her career helping the community understand complex information. As a professor of technical communication and user experience, Lauer has worked to empower her students to take complexity, data, technology and science and make it useful to everyone.

“My calling as a professor is not to simply introduce students to today’s technologies, but to help them cultivate identities that are curious, agile and excited to engage with the technologies of the future,” she said.

For over 20 years, Lauer’s work has led to her teaching undergraduate and graduate students, contributing to dozens of peer-reviewed works and pursuing research supported by the National Science Foundation and the Virginia G. Piper Foundation. Most recently, she was the user experience architect on the $45 million Arizona Water Innovation Initiative, focused on empowering Arizona communities about a sustainable water future. Through the initiative, Lauer and her team worked with Arizona towns, tribal communities and state agencies to make public information related to water easier to find and access by developing interactive virtual reality games, chatbots and a traveling museum exhibit that is on display at the Arizona Science Center.

“Lauer’s work and contributions exemplify principles embedded in ASU’s charter, including our commitment to inclusion, excellence and impact,” says Dave White, the team lead for the Arizona Water Innovation Initiative. “She combines and evidence-based and research-informed approach to teaching and learning innovation with a commitment to inclusion and empowerment for her students and colleagues.”

Whether in or out of the classroom, Lauer continues to inspire future learners through her inclusive style of teaching that drives curiosity through applied learning in real-world projects.

Co-creator of the first online BA in physics in US

(Video: {https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJDt4JZYWxY})

Michael Treacy is a professor and associate chair of academics for the Department of Physics. He brought his expertise in electron microscopy and material sciences to ASU in 2003 after research stints at the NEC Research Institute and ExxonMobil. After his arrival, he continued with his previous research and moved into studying disordered materials — materials that aren't crystalline — using a technique he helped develop known as fluctuation electron microscopy.

He proceeded to pick up a project that had been on hold since his days at Exxon and began working on modeling zeolite structures, materials that convert crude oil into products such as gasoline, benzene and other fine chemicals. He was able to build a database of hypothetical zeolites based on the mathematics of how they connect with each other, ultimately discovering the structure of the material.

Outside his research and efforts to make complex science more accessible, Treacy also helped create the nation's first online bachelor's degree programs in the discipline.

He has previously been recognized for his dedication in student mentorship with two Outstanding Teacher awards from the department as well as receiving The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences' Zebulon Pearce Distinguished Teaching Award for the natural sciences.

"I came here because of the strong reputation in physics and for electron microscopy. I was nervous about teaching at first because I hadn't done that, but I found that I enjoyed it. I enjoyed engaging with students," Treacy said.

As for this new chapter and recognition, Treacy says the honor was a welcome surprise.

"I felt like I was a professor who got an A-plus," Treacy said.

Gabi Herrod, Megan Neely and Preston Swan contributed to this article.

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Main image



From left: University Provost Nancy Gonzales, newly named President's Professors Michael Treacy, Shelley Haydel and Claire Lauer, and ASU President Michael Crow at the September promotion ceremony. Photo by Tim Trumble