Chapman Family Teaching Awards: Professor Anastacia Kohl

Anastacia Kohl, EdD is a Teaching Associate Professor and Director of Spanish Language Instruction in the Department of Romance Studies and an expert language instructor. Students learn how to speak, write, and read Spanish, and she inspires in them a love for Spanish. She creates a true community of learning within her class. She also has a significant impact on teaching assistants and inspires in them a newfound love for teaching. Dr. Kohl is a compassionate teacher who truly cares about her students and fosters a supportive environment within her class. This was evident in numerous student comments:

“Every week since the beginning of class, Dr. Kohl told us how we were a family and how we needed to respect each other like a family. It really set the tone for the class for the rest of the semester. . . . Compared to other classes, I developed stronger relationships with my classmates and I genuinely feel like that is due to Dr. Kohl setting up the ‘family’ environment. We were a diverse class but we were never judged on our appearances or beliefs. It was always a supportive environment, even when our successes and opportunities included things outside of Spanish.”

“Dr. Kohl's teaching style is incredibly well constructed. She has considered every manner possible of making the class period a constructive time. . . . In her course I learned about teaching! I learned how to be the best professor I can be for my students. She created tasks which gave us the opportunity to expand our comfort level and try to methods of teaching. She also showed us what it was like to learn from these different methods by using them in class herself. It was really helpful to see different teaching practices used and to see hands-on what works best.”

Dr. Kohl has an exceptional ability to inspire in her students a love for learning and a love for Spanish. She has transformed and empowered students and has had a positive impact on their lives. Her impact is evident in student comments:

“Dra. Kohl has definitely impacted the lives of her student for the better. I know that she has made many people in my Spanish class contemplate a minor or even a major at UNC due to Dra. Kohl and her attitude towards teaching and the wider world that can be explored through Spanish. I know, for one, that I might pursue a Spanish minor in the professions because of Dra. Kohl and this class.”

“There are so many words that can be used to describe the way Professor Kohl teaches. Engaging. Challenging. Practical. Inspiring. Never once have I sat in class and thought to myself, 'I took all of my required language classes, I seriously don’t need to be here.' I was in that class because I wanted to learn. And learn I did.”

For her exceptional ability to teach Spanish in a manner that engages and inspires students, for instilling in students the confidence needed to succeed and learn, and for her dedication to fostering an environment where all students feel they belong and are inclusive of others, we award the 2023 Chapman Award to Dr. Anastasia Kohl.
Chapman Family Teaching Awards: Søren Palmer

Søren Palmer, PhD, is a Teaching Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature who specializes in English, comparative literature, and creative writing. His classroom is a place where students from varied cultural, religious, and educational backgrounds establish relations and learn from each other. Taking a class with Dr. Palmer has been described as a life-changing experience. Dr. Palmer instills an atmosphere of trust where difficult topics are shared and thoughtfully and beautifully discussed. One student shared:

“From the first day I walked into Dr. Palmer’s English class, I could already tell that I’d love the course. When going over the . . . syllabus, Dr. Palmer was frank with his expectations, explaining that as young adults we need to be responsible and work hard. While his standards were high, they were always reasonable and centered on each student growing as an individual writer, making sure that our progress was compared against our past self rather than amongst peers. The personalized nature of his teaching and evaluation was both extremely unique and refreshing. . . .”

Dr. Palmer makes connections in the classroom that ensure that the students learn challenging material, but perhaps more importantly, that they learn that the process can be fun and collaborative, even when it is rigorous and challenging. As one student shares:

“Dr Palmer’s style of teaching involves first creating an atmosphere where having honest and thought-provoking conversations as a class are celebrated and encouraged. I am generally averse to talking in class, but Dr. Palmer created an environment where I actively wanted to share my thoughts and interpretations of our readings. He also meticulously selects readings for his classes that will encourage this open communication, while allowing difficult but important conversations to be had. This allows closeness to develop among the students in his class . . . The way in which Dr. Palmer teaches his students and facilitates discussion is incredibly impressive and powerful, and . . . more people should have the opportunity to take a class taught by him.”

Dr. Palmer has been consistently described as the best of the best, a magical teacher who combines rigor and hard work with fun and profound student engagement. His students shared praise and gratitude for his dedication to them and to their learning:

“Dr. Palmer was best professor I had in my undergrad. I took two classes with him; freshman and senior year. He encouraged classroom discussion; felt like a conversational class. I learned a ton. He exposed us to a variety of perspective[s] around race and American culture. He’s funny so he makes you feel comfortable. He values everyone’s comments.”

Dr. Palmer also served as chair of the Teaching Professors Advisor Committee, becoming a leader on key issues affecting teaching professors. His colleague characterized this as “a huge job,” which Dr. Palmer completed with “great sensitivity, good humor, and organizational skill.”

For his remarkable ability to help students and teachers reach their full potential and his dedication to creating a trusting community of diverse learners, we award the 2023 Chapman Award to Dr. Søren Palmer.
Chapman Family Teaching Awards: Milada Vachudova

Milada Vachudova, PhD is a Professor in the Department of Political Science who specializes in European politics, political change in postcommunist Europe, the European Union and the impact of international actors on domestic politics. She draws connections across time and continents to deepen student understanding of domestic and world politics. She is an extraordinarily well-cited scholar in her field and, despite all her success, has a tremendous ability to teach, inspire students, and extend genuine care and compassion toward them. She is a quintessential teacher-scholar. As one student writes:

“Professor Vachudova designs exciting courses that combine macro perspectives with the perspectives of individuals who exercise power or experience its consequences. To this end, she supplements material from important historical and comparative books with small group discussions about people who did extraordinary and mundane things in response to war, displacement, oppression and community. This involves film clips, poetry, interviews, paintings, music, and documentaries. Her syllabi are rich in these sorts of materials with creative homework projects to supplement professional political science course readings.”

Professor Vachudova is an inspiring teacher invested in her students’ success. She recognizes that students come from varying backgrounds, with unique interests and needs. She provides an inclusive environment where all students feel welcome and comfortable sharing their thoughts and perspectives and seeks to ensure they recognize and understand differing perspectives. As some of her students explained:

“[She] is a creative, inspiring, excellent teacher who is attuned to changing student needs and interests, especially students from minority backgrounds, and adapts her courses accordingly. Professor Vachudova focuses primarily on two goals: first, to help all students develop the analytical tools they need to be thoughtful citizens; second, to provide all students with basic information about how power works institutionally and behaviorally, and about broader forces that are involved in driving political change.”

“In both of my classes with Professor Vachudova there was a diverse group of students with different perspectives and in each class there was always an opportunity for each student to share their perspective. Even if students disagreed on a topic, Professor Vachudova was able to keep discussion civil and on topic.”

Most notable perhaps is her ability to inspire, transform, and empower students. As one student so powerfully shared:

“Dr. Vachudova has been an invaluable mentor who has altered much of the trajectory of my life, inspired me to continue my intellectual growth, and equipped me with tools and confidence to succeed. The classes I have taken with Dr. Vachudova have pushed me to be intellectually curious about European affairs and to be a critical thinker[.]”

For her exceptional ability to teach European politics in a manner that engages and inspires students, for helping students reach their full potential, and for her dedication to fostering a thoughtful and inclusive classroom environment, we award the 2023 Chapman Award to Dr. Milada Vach