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TO: Boston University Faculty and Staff

FROM: Gloria Waters, University Provost and Chief Academic Officer G.W.

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SUBJECT: Recipients of the 2025 Gitner Family Award for Innovation in Teaching with Technology and the University Provost's Scholar-Teacher of the Year Award

Each spring, we have the pleasure of announcing the recipients of two of our most prestigious University-wide teaching awards: the **Gerald and Deanne Gitner Family Award for Innovation in Teaching with Technology** and the **Boston University Provost's Scholar-Teacher of the Year Award**.

These awards each year give us a chance to recognize some of the most innovative and creative members of our academic community and the outstanding work they are doing to advance the practice of teaching and explore new frontiers in the creation and transmission of knowledge.

2025 Gerald and Deanne Gitner Family Award for Innovation in Teaching with Technology

Supported through the generosity of BU alumnus Gerald Gitner (CAS '66), his wife Deanne, and their family, the Gitner Award recognizes the faculty member or team that best exemplifies innovation in teaching by use, development, or adaptation of technology. The award celebrates innovation that results in positive learning outcomes for undergraduate students and that is recognized or adopted by faculty colleagues within or outside Boston University. The recipient of this year's Gitner Family Award for Innovation in Teaching with Technology is **Dr. Elizabeth Co, senior lecturer of biology in the College of Arts & Sciences.**

Dr. Co has been cited for her efforts to support anatomy and biology students through the adoption of software that lets her measure the success of her own teaching methods and pinpoint – using student performance data – the pedagogical practices that best enhance critical thinking.

When Dr. Co first adopted the ExamSoft program, it was to upgrade the visual quality of anatomy images she used on exams, enabling students to manipulate and zoom in on high-resolution color pictures on their devices, without allowing for cheating. An added bonus of the software was the ability to break down and identify the types of questions where students performed notably better (memorization and understanding) and those requiring more time and attention (application and analysis). Using that data, Dr. Co quickly realized the only way to

improve students' ability to not only digest but *apply* new knowledge was by increasing critical thinking opportunities in class. Virtually overnight, she transformed her classroom to provide more time applying those skills through case studies and problem sets. Within weeks, student performance on final exams was strong across all areas with marked improvement in critical thinking.

News of Dr. Co's success and adoption of ExamSoft spread quickly across the biology department and later to programs within other schools. It would serve a key role during the COVID pandemic, as Dr. Co led efforts to implement the technology University-wide and mentor faculty on its use to provide students with detailed feedback during remote learning.

Today nearly 10,000 BU students use ExamSoft in one or more of their classes, and Dr. Co's work has resulted in numerous publications, workshops for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the National Science Foundation, and international conference presentations. "Dr. Co is what all other professors should strive to be," writes one of her students. "Her class is challenging but so rewarding in the end because she teaches her students to think critically and reason their way through every question and case study."

2025 Boston University Provost's Scholar-Teacher of the Year Award

The University Provost's Scholar-Teacher of the Year Award recognizes outstanding scholars who excel as teachers inside and outside the classroom and who contribute to the art and science of teaching and learning. The embrace of this dual role – scholar and teacher – is at the heart of Boston University's mission, and this year it is our pleasure to recognize **Dr. Lei Tian, associate professor of electrical and computer engineering in the College of Engineering.**

Professor Tian has been cited for his ability to create dynamic learning environments and curricula that deftly integrate cutting-edge research and empower students to become active participants in discovery. Professor Tian has earned global recognition for pioneering research that combines physical optics with computational algorithms to advance the state-of-the-art in areas such as biomedical imaging, microscopy, and remote sensing. A current Scialog Fellow in Advancing BioImaging, he has received major grants to support his research, including a National Science Foundation CAREER Award and a Chan Zuckerberg Initiative award for creating an imaging platform that leads to new treatments and targets for drug development. His innovations have garnered BU honors as well, including the Hariri Institute for Computing's Research Incubation Award and the College of Engineering's Early Career Excellence in Research Award.

Professor Tian's drive to advance new technologies is rivaled only by his gift for distinctive course design and the care he devotes to mentoring and preparing new engineers. In courses like Computational Optical Imaging and Signals & Systems, students routinely speak of the interactive lectures and hands-on lab components he employs to boost engagement and foster critical thinking. In lieu of traditional final exams, he designs group-based research projects that encourage students to apply theoretical knowledge to solve real-world problems, mirroring the challenges they will face in their professional careers. The goal: ensuring students feel confident taking risks and enjoy the journey of exploration. Writes one student, "His dedication to ensuring each student grasps the material is evident, and his approachability fosters an environment where

questions are encouraged and learning flourishes. Personally, I find Dr. Tian to be one of the best professors I've ever had the pleasure of learning from."

Through his exceptional teaching, leading-edge research, and commitment to integrating research and education, Dr. Tian, in the words of his nominator, "exemplifies the qualities of an outstanding educator, scholar, and mentor" and has profoundly influenced student learning and academic growth at all levels.

Please join us in congratulating Drs. Co and Tian for their outstanding efforts and accomplishments over the last year. We would also like to give special thanks to the Provost's Faculty Teaching Awards Committee, whose membership is listed below, for their many hours of work helping to evaluate and identify this year's Gitner and Scholar-Teacher of the Year winners.

Provost's Faculty Teaching Awards Committee

Chair:
Amie Grills, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs

Members:
Sorochi Anyaibe, Undergraduate Student, Sargent College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences (2024 Dean Elsbeth Melville Scholarship Winner)

Pooja Chainani, PhD Candidate, College of Engineering

Bobak Nazer, Associate Professor of Electrical & Computer Engineering, College of Engineering (2024 Gitner Award for Innovation in Teaching with Technology Recipient)

Fallou Ngom, Professor of Anthropology, College of Arts & Sciences (2024 Provost's Scholar-Teacher of the Year Award Recipient)

Alexis Peri, Associate Professor of History, College of Arts & Sciences (2024 Metcalf Award for Excellence in Teaching Recipient)

Romy Ruukel, Executive Director of Academic Technology & Innovation, BU Institute for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Russell Stone, Assistant Provost for Academic Assessment

Katrina Tronco, Undergraduate Student, College of Arts & Sciences (2024 Harold C. Case Scholarship Winner)

Veronika Wirtz, Professor of Global Health, School of Public Health (2024 Metcalf Award for Excellence in Teaching Recipient)