

Dear Bobcats,

Earlier this afternoon, we had the pleasure of recognizing the recipients of Frostburg State University's 2026 President's Distinguished Faculty and Staff Awards. This year, five outstanding faculty members and five outstanding staff members were nominated. As always, selecting one faculty award recipient and one staff award recipient is no easy task. This year, the strength of the nominees made that choice especially difficult, and I simply could not recognize only one in each category. Instead, we are honoring two faculty members and two staff members whose exceptional contributions reflect the very best of Frostburg State University. For those who were unable to attend the celebration, I want to once again congratulate this year's honorees and thank them for their outstanding service and dedication to FSU.

The President's Distinguished Faculty Award recognizes faculty members whose exceptional service advances the University's mission, strategic priorities and commitment to student success. This year's faculty honorees are **Dr. Naomi Gades**, assistant professor of communication and literature, and **Dr. Lilly Ye**, professor of marketing.

Since joining FSU in 2021, Dr. Gades has distinguished herself through her commitment to teaching, academic assessment and institutional improvement. In addition to teaching first-year writing and college composition, she has provided valuable leadership on the Academic Program Review Performance Task Force and other initiatives that strengthen academic quality and FSU's mission.

Dr. Ye is widely recognized for her collaborative leadership, dedication to students and commitment to academic excellence. Through her mentorship, leadership of the American Marketing Association chapter, and support of strategic partnerships and interdisciplinary initiatives, she has made a lasting impact on our students, her colleagues and the broader University community.

The President's Distinguished Staff Award honors employees whose exceptional service and leadership advance the University's mission, goals and strategic priorities. This year's staff honorees are **Dr. Kate Kinsinger**, director of the Center for Academic Advising and Retention (CAAR), and **Michael Sheetz**, comptroller.

Since joining CAAR in 2021, Dr. Kinsinger has led numerous initiatives focused on student success, retention and belonging. Her leadership in implementing the dual-advising model, enhancing the Academic Pathways Program and developing peer mentorship opportunities has strengthened support systems for our students and contributed meaningfully to their success.

Mr. Sheetz has provided exemplary leadership and expertise across several major institutional initiatives, most notably as the lead financial expert for FSU's Workday implementation project. His professionalism, financial stewardship and dedication to the University's operational success have earned the respect and appreciation of colleagues across campus and throughout the University System of Maryland.

These four individuals exemplify the very best of Frostburg State University through their dedication, professionalism and unwavering commitment to our students and institution. Please join me in congratulating Dr. Gades, Dr. Ye, Dr. Kinsinger and Mr. Sheetz on this well-deserved recognition and in thanking them for the many ways they strengthen our university community.

I also want to extend my sincere thanks to every faculty and staff member who was nominated. The strength of this year's nominees speaks volumes about the talent, dedication and care that define our Bobcat community, and I am deeply grateful for all you do to support our students and advance the mission of Frostburg State University.

With FSU pride,

Darlene Brannigan Smith, PhD  
Interim President