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Trout Named 2024 Kemp Award Winner

April 21, 2023

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Professor of Theatre Arts Curtis Trout received the highest teaching honor at Illinois Wesleyan University on April 19 as the 2024 recipient of the [Kemp Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence](#).

- Watch: [The Kemp Foundation's Teaching Excellence Award Ceremony](#)
- View: [The Kemp Foundation's Teaching Excellence Award Ceremony Program](#) (pdf)

The recipient is selected by the Promotion and Tenure Committee and is based on faculty nominations. Supported by the Kemp Foundation, the award recognizes teaching spirit, passion, scholarship and service.

Trout, who has been a member of IWU's faculty since 1990, teaches scene design and serves as co-head of the Theatre Design and Technology Program. He said it was a great surprise to receive the award.

"I simply go about the business of teaching and mentoring every single day I wake up. I love teaching and especially the 'it' moment when a student visibly makes the connection — there's nothing better in life. I still can't believe that I get to be a designer and a teacher as a 'job.' It's really a gift I receive every moment," said Trout.



Professor of Theatre Arts Curtis Trout embraces a colleague after being named the recipient of the 2024 Kemp Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence.

As is tradition for the Kemp Foundation Award ceremony, Provost Mark Brodl teased the crowd with hints about Trout's reputation on campus before announcing him as the winner. Brodl referenced the head of Aphrodite that rests on the roof of McPherson Theatre — a stage prop that Trout originally constructed for a student-designed production in 2002. Brodl placed a plant beside him at the podium without any additional context — a nod to the many plants that adorn Trout's office.

Brodl also shared glowing remarks about Trout from colleagues, students and alumni, who point to the theatre professor as someone who "meets students where they are and does everything within his power to help them get to where they desire to be."

In a support letter for Trout, an alumna said, "I pray that a man who is just as important in my life today as he was when I was 18 is recognized for all that he has given to us, his students, now by his colleagues and friends."

Trout earned a master of fine arts in science design and bachelor of arts in choral and general music education from Western Illinois University. He has accomplished over 100 designs in scenery, lighting, costumes and sound for Illinois Wesleyan and professional venues since his appointment. He has served as a scene design member of United Scenic Artists since 1989, the union representing professional theatrical designers. Trout said he is most proud of witnessing IWU design and technical graduates move fluidly into internship and staff positions with professional theater organizations.

Wendell and Loretta Hess Endowed Professor of Chemistry and Chair of Chemistry Ram Mohan, [the 2023 Kemp Award recipient](#), was recognized by Toni Jenkins, daughter of emeritus Illinois Wesleyan trustee Parker Kemp, on behalf of the Kemp family and Kemp Foundation.



Wendell and Loretta Hess Endowed Professor of Chemistry and Chair of Chemistry Ram Mohan, the 2023 Kemp Award recipient, shares an address titled "Life Lessons from Adventures in a Research Lab."

In his address, "Life Lessons from Adventures in a Research Lab," Mohan shared the advice he has given to students in his classroom and labs throughout the years, highlighting successful alumni who explored the world of chemistry under his guidance.

Using these examples, Mohan encouraged students in the audience to focus on passion and perseverance above all else.

"Some students come in and they know exactly what they want to do. Sometimes plans change and that stresses out many students. It's OK if your life plans change, as long as you're passionate about what you do. Curiosity, passion, hard work, attention to detail — is what is going to get you places," said Mohan, who started his career at Illinois Wesleyan in 1996.

Also at the ceremony, retiring members of the IWU faculty were recognized: Earl and Marian A. Beling Professor of Natural Sciences Tian-Xiao He, University Archivist and Special Collections Librarian and Associate Professor Meg Miner, Professor of Anthropology Chuck Springwood and Professor of Greek and Roman Studies Nancy Sultan.

By Julia Perez