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Drici Named 2025 Kemp Award Winner

BY JULIA PEREZ | APRIL 18, 2024

NEWS



BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Professor of Mathematics Zahia Drici was awarded the highest teaching honor at Illinois Wesleyan University on April 17 as the 2025 recipient of the [Kemp Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence](#).

The recipient is selected by a committee of faculty and is based on nominations from colleagues. Supported by the Kemp Foundation, the award recognizes teaching spirit, passion, scholarship and service.

A member of IWU's faculty since 1995, Drici is also chair of the Mathematics Department and was Associate Dean of Curriculum from 2009-2013. She has served on numerous University committees, task forces and work groups. Her work has been published in mathematics journals and presented at conferences around the globe.

"What an honor it is to receive this award," said Drici. "Working with students on a daily basis and following their progress over the years has been such a rewarding experience. I am delighted and humbled to have my name added to the long list of distinguished colleagues who received this honor before me."



Professor of Mathematics Zahia Drici, front, is applauded by colleagues after receiving the 2025 Kemp Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence.

To build suspense before the 2025 recipient was announced, Interim Provost and Dean of Faculty Abbie Kerr gave hints of Drici's contributions to the academic community at IWU, describing the math professor as someone who creates a lively, collaborative experience in the classroom while instilling confidence through innovative pedagogy.

"A colleague said it is rare to find her in the hall after class without students walking with her, discussing the revelations of the day," said Kerr.

An alum submitted a letter of support for Drici's nomination, stating that "she had a lot of patience in explaining difficult concepts to students and I feel that she genuinely wanted students to succeed."

Another letter of support from an alumna said, "Dr. Drici set an incredible example for me and other women in mathematics at IWU, always encouraging and pushing us to be our best."

Drici earned a doctorate in applied mathematics and a doctorate in electrical engineering, both from the Florida Institute of Technology. Her research interests include ordinary differential equations and dynamical systems, difference and functional equations, integral equations and electromagnetic theory and its applications.

Professor of Theatre Arts Curtis Trout, the [2024 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.



Professor of Mathematics Zahia Drici, left, is congratulated by Professor of Hispanic Studies World Languages, Literatures and Cultures Carmela Ferrad  ns following the Kemp award ceremony

In his address "Life by Design," Trout spoke to the value of handicraft and

how he is constantly planning and creating a project in his mind, even in his dreams. He shed light on the careful process of completing a successful stage design, showing copies of scene sketches, set models, shots of productions on stage and drafting for set arrangements.

"Theatre is a profession that aspires to hide 100% of the work necessary to achieve it from the audience," said Trout.

Trout recalled a colleague complimenting him on the beauty of a past set design for a School of Theatre Arts production. "I said, 'That's not my design work, that's my teaching that you're seeing,'" said Trout.

Trout's teaching history also includes voice instruction at the junior high and high school level, a skill he showcased by singing two songs by Aaron Copland and Moses Hogan during his presentation.

As a faculty member at Illinois Wesleyan since 1990, Trout teaches scene design and serves as co-head of the Theatre Design and Technology Program. He has accomplished more than 110 designs in scenery, lighting, costumes and sound for the University and more than 30 designs for



Professor of Theatre Arts Curtis Trout, the 2024 Kemp Award recipient, stands with Professor of Mathematics Zahia Drici after she was named the 2025 award recipient.

professional venues since his appointment. Trout said his proudest achievement is that IWU design and technical graduates move fluidly into internship and staff positions with professional organizations such as Disney, the Santa Fe Opera, Williamstown Theatre Festival, The Berkshire Theatre Festival and The Glimmerglass Opera.

Also at the ceremony, retiring members of the IWU faculty were recognized: Associate Professor of English Wes Chapman, Associate Professor of Educational Studies and Writing Program Director Pennie Gray, George C. and Ella Beach Lewis Endowed Professor of Biology Given Harper, Davis U. Merwin Endowed Professor of History Gordon Horwitz, Professor of History Bob Schultz, Professor of Theatre Arts Nancy Loitz, Assistant Professor of Physical Education Dennis Martel, Professor of Business Administration Bill Walsh, Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities Scott Ferguson and Professor of Music Bill West. Coordinator of Nursing Interventions Laboratory Arleta deDianous and Ben and Susan Rhodes Endowed Professor in Peace and Social Justice and Professor of Physical Education Chris Schumacher were also acknowledged for their retirements last summer.