

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

June 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: Deans, Directors and Chairpersons
Distinguished Academic Staff Recipients 1999-2026

FROM: Teresa Mastin, Vice Provost and Associate Vice President for
Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs

SUBJECT: Distinguished Academic Specialist and Staff Awards 2026-27

Annually, the All-University Awards Committee, appointed by the Provost, selects recipients of the **Distinguished Academic Staff Award**. The awards provide university-wide recognition to academic specialist faculty and MSU Extension (MSUE) academic staff for their significant accomplishments and distinguished careers. Up to four Distinguished Academic Staff Awards are conferred, each with a stipend of \$2,500. We plan to recognize the recipients in spring 2027.

Faculty, administrators, colleagues, students, faculty or student organizations, or alumni can initiate nominations; self-nominations are welcome. Nominations must be submitted to the nominee's dean or major administrative unit (MAU) administrator to be forwarded for university-level consideration. The college/MAU must verify the nominee's length of continuous MSU employment and the completeness of the candidate's support materials. Although not required, the college/MAU may further review the candidate's materials. MSU academic specialists or extension academic staff are to be included in these reviews.

Nominators may contact honorifics@msu.edu for feedback if the nominee is not selected for the award. A nominee not selected may be resubmitted in the subsequent award cycle. The nominee must be resubmitted to the dean or MAU administrator and then forwarded for university-level consideration. Any supporting materials should be updated. Failure to do so will likely impact the nominee's candidacy.

Nomination forms and instructions are attached and contain details about the selection criteria and nomination materials required. Colleges/other MAUs should forward nominee dossiers to the Office of the Provost via the [Distinguished Academic Staff Nomination Form](#) **no later than Monday, November 9, 2026.**
NOMINEE DOSSIERS SUBMITTED WITHOUT ALL OF THE REQUIRED MATERIALS WILL BE RETURNED.

Please do not hesitate to contact honorifics@msu.edu with questions. This memorandum and the attachments are on the [All-University Awards website](#).



Office of the Provost

Hannah Administration
Building
Michigan State University
426 Auditorium Road
Suite 430
East Lansing, MI 48824

517-432-6550
Fax: 517-432-9601
provost.msu.edu

Academic Specialist Handbook

The Distinguished Academic Staff Award recognizes the outstanding achievements of those professionals who serve the University in advising, curriculum development, outreach, extension, research, and teaching. Distinguished Academic Staff Awards are made to members of the academic staff who are appointed as Academic Specialists or Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) Academic Staff (faculty with Extension-supported appointments are not eligible for this award). Academic specialists who are recipients of a Distinguished Academic Staff Award are recognized with a “Distinguished Academic Specialist Award.” MSUE academic staff members who are recipients of a Distinguished Academic Staff Award are recognized with a “Distinguished Extension Academic Staff Award.”

Up to four Distinguished Academic Staff Awards are given annually. These awards provide University-wide recognition and reward to outstanding individuals with careers demonstrating long-term excellence and exceptional contributions to Michigan State University. Eligibility for nomination requires a minimum of ten years of continuous MSU employment as an academic specialist or an MSU Extension academic staff member.

Nominations may be initiated by faculty, colleagues, administrators, alumni, students, faculty organizations or student organizations; self-nominations are also welcome. To be considered by the University Distinguished Academic Staff Award Selection Committee, nominations must have the endorsement of the dean or major administrative unit administrator.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
DISTINGUISHED ACADEMIC SPECIALIST/STAFF AWARD 2026-27

The significant accomplishments and distinguished careers of outstanding academic specialist faculty and staff contribute to and augment excellence at the University. The Distinguished Academic Staff Award recognizes the outstanding achievements of professionals who serve the University in advising, curriculum development, outreach, extension, research, and teaching. Distinguished Academic Staff Awards are made to members of the academic staff who are appointed as academic specialists or Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) academic staff (faculty with Extension-supported appointments are not eligible for this award). Academic specialists who receive a Distinguished Academic Staff Award are recognized by “Distinguished Academic Specialist Award” and MSUE academic staff members who receive a Distinguished Academic Staff Award are recognized by “Distinguished Extension Academic Staff Award.”

The Distinguished Academic Specialist/Staff Award recognizes the unique efforts and broad range of excellent contributions made by the University’s academic specialists and MSUE academic staff. University-level recognition increases awareness of the diversity of excellence of MSU’s academic staff and provides added incentive to strive for excellence. The award acknowledges extraordinary academic careers and achievements.

Up to four Distinguished Academic Staff Awards are given annually. These awards provide University-wide recognition and reward to outstanding individuals with careers demonstrating **long-term excellence and exceptional contributions to Michigan State University**. Award recipients receive a stipend of \$2,500.00.ⁱ

Nominations for the Distinguished Academic Specialist/Staff Award should be based on a **comprehensive and sustained record of excellence** in one or more of the areas of advising, curriculum development, outreach, extension, research, and teaching. Nominees shall have made **significant contributions to Michigan State University and recognized contributions external to Michigan State University**. Nominees shall represent the character and qualities of excellence reflective of Michigan State University, including the application of **diversity** principles in the ongoing performance of the nominee’s responsibilities. **A major portion of the nominee’s distinguished professional record of excellence shall have been achieved at Michigan State University**. Eligibility for nomination requires **a minimum of ten years of continuous MSU employment as an academic specialist or an MSU Extension academic staff member**.

Nominations may be initiated by faculty, colleagues, administrators, alumni, students, faculty organizations or student organizations; self-nominations are welcome. Nominations are to be submitted to the dean of the college or administrator of the major administrative unit (MAU) in which the nominee is appointed. To be forwarded for University-level consideration, nominations must have the endorsement of the dean or MAU administrator. The college or MAU is responsible for verifying the nominee’s length of MSU employment and the completeness of the candidate’s packet of support materials. Additional review of nominations by the college or MAU is not required. However, this is an option. If a unit chooses to review nominations, MSU academic specialists or extension academic staff members should be included in the review process.

Each college and MAU forwards the nominations of eligible candidates to the Provost Office for the Distinguished Academic Specialist/Staff Award selection committee to consider. The committee is comprised of three academic specialists and three MSUE academic staff members; names are submitted by MSUE and the Academic Specialist Advisory Committee to the Provost Office. Committee membership will reflect the diverse composition of academic specialists and Extension academic staff members to ensure that the committee will be sensitive to the diversity and multicultural commitments of the University.

All-University Awards nominations, including those for the Distinguished Academic Specialist/Staff Award, will be reviewed for misconduct and violations of University policy to ensure alignment with the [University's Mission and Values](#) before being advanced for committee review.

Criteria

Each nominee will be assessed against the following general criteria, with the understanding that all criteria may not be appropriate for each candidate, and that the uniqueness of individual positions will influence the weighing of applicable **criteria** for each nominee:

- A. Evidence of excellence and widely recognized academic unit contributions in areas such as advising, curriculum development, outreach, extension, research, teaching and related administrative involvement with support from the University community
- B. Evidence of innovative and creative contributions through individual or team membership efforts in areas such as advising, curriculum development, outreach, extension, research, teaching and related administrative involvement with support from the University community.
- C. Nominees shall represent the character and qualities of excellence reflective of MSU, including the application of diversity principles in the ongoing conduct of the nominee's responsibilities. As appropriate, other peers, including representatives of peer institutions, national associations and organizations, professional associations, and others may also acknowledge endeavors of excellence.

TIPS FOR WRITING DRAFT CITATIONS

(Use this outline as applicable to the award)

IMPORTANT:

Please print the name as it should appear in the awards brochure. Draft citations should be approximately 325 words. *If you wish to see examples of draft citations, please reach out to honorifics@msu.edu.*

The citation will be printed in the program booklet. The citation should be an accurate statement of the person's achievements, but it should also be:

Distinctive. The citations should reflect an honoree's distinction; a relevant tidbit about the person (as opposed to the person's achievements) is helpful (e.g., "An advisor who is also broadly versed in music, literature, and the fine arts, Ms. X.")

Creative. Search for unusual and descriptive adjectives, varying cadences and turns of phrase.

Easily understood by a lay audience.

Citations should include such items as:

- A quotation from a student (or a colleague) from the material submitted adds human interest to the citation. Such quotations should be specific rather than general. "One of the most important things Ms. X communicates is her conviction that service in a university can be the heart of an honorable way of life." is preferable to "She was the best advisor I've ever had." Don't overlook humorous quotations.
- Statements of the person's area of expertise and the overall significance of the person's contributions/achievements to the world/the university, especially across disciplines. How far does their influence reach? State? National? International? Public/private sector? What constituent groups?
- Specific ways in which her/his excellence has been evidenced. Undergraduate, graduate, or both. Extension. Advancing diversity. Textbooks and curriculum development. Student advising and mentorship. Where do students go after MSU? Support for funding for equipment or scholarships.
- Specific evidence of scholarship and contributions to other areas of the university's mission, such as research. Avoid citing numbers of things unless they are phenomenal. Instead, cite capstone examples. Use layperson's terms where possible and cite the usefulness or results of the person's work in their largest context. Grants, professional societies, and awards are appropriate here, but only the most significant.
- Other - Professional affiliations, consulting service/outreach. MSU committee service. Again, use only the most significant examples.
- Summary sentence of the person's worthiness for the award.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
DISTINGUISHED ACADEMIC SPECIALIST/STAFF AWARD

CHECKLIST

ONE COPY. DOSSIERS SUBMITTED WITHOUT ALL OF THE REQUIRED MATERIALS WILL BE RETURNED.

- 1. Completed DATA FORM** (to be completed via [Distinguished Academic Staff/Specialist Nomination Form](#)).
- 2. POSITION DESCRIPTION.** Provide a description or a summary statement of the nominee's **current** professional position and responsibilities.
- 3. STATEMENT OF NOMINATION (No more than four (4) pages).** Please enclose a written statement summarizing the nominee's continuous demonstration of excellence and that reflects a distinguished career as defined by the nominating criteria listed above in the description of the award (or on page 3). Also, include pertinent information concerning the quality of performance, contributions to the unit and the academy, as well as the community outside of Michigan State University. You may use evidence of scholarly activities, advising, public service, teaching, program development or enhancement, and any other pertinent information to substantiate demonstrations of excellence; also include any University, regional and/or national awards or recognition the nominee has received that demonstrate this. For MSU Extension staff, consider that Extension bulletins are outreach publications and may be evidence of research and/or applied research. Additionally, any pertinent information that demonstrates the nominee's attainment of excellence will be considered. The above is neither exhaustive nor restrictive, but rather representative.
- 4. ENDORSEMENT BY LEAD DEAN OR MAJOR ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT ADMINISTRATOR.** If the candidate is jointly appointed, the lead dean provides the endorsement. Other deans or major administrative unit administrators may endorse a candidate, and these additional endorsements will not count against the required number of letters of support.
- 5. LETTERS OF SUPPORT (At least three but not more than five)** should substantiate the nominee's distinguished career and apply specifically to the award. Letters may include discussions of the nominee's performance, and internal and external (as appropriate) impact, and scholarly activities. Letters should vary from peers within the university and, as appropriate, from peers external to the university.
- 6. CURRENT CURRICULUM VITAE.**
- 7. CITATION.** Please enclose a citation of approximately 325 words to appear in the awards brochure if the nominee is selected to receive the award. Be sure to list nominee's name as they wish it to appear in the awards brochure and be sure to list joint appointments, with the primary appointment listed first.

[†]The Tax Reform Act of 1986 eliminated the general exclusion relating to awards made in recognition of educational or scientific achievement. As a result, all MSU academic staff award stipends are taxable income and subject to withholdings and FICA.