

Excellence in Teaching: National Award for CEHS Professor | CEHS

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An innovative teaching method is bringing increased attention to Dr. Courtney Stewart, an assistant professor in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership. Stewart was recently recognized with the national Excellence in Teaching award from the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA).

"It's a nice pat on the back," Stewart said. "I've never sought after an award, but this is a nice validation from my peers that they consider what I've done to be excellent."

Stewart's work was recognized because of the unique approach he takes with one of his graduate-level courses that explores different learning needs. Rather than requiring students to complete assignments in a standard form, he allows them to choose what their projects will look like.

Students are given the option to watch videos, listen to recordings, or read text to research their topics, and then show what they learned by completing the assignment in similar fashion—a video, an audio recording, a typed essay, or a hands-on project.

"It is essentially four different classes in one, but it's all the same content," Stewart said. "It gives flexibility to the students to engage with the material in the way that works best for them."

Because they are studying different learning needs in this course, the distinctive assignments make a greater impact on the students. "I want them to see that I value that everyone learns differently," Stewart said. "They get to

learn through personal example that it's valuable to focus on student needs."

His approach is receiving particular attention from the online learning community as instructors have searched for nontraditional ways to make online courses more beneficial. Stewart was also awarded an Excellence in Online Teaching award from the Online Learning Consortium.

Winners of the UPCEA awards are first nominated, then selected by judges based on recommendations provided by the nominee's colleagues. Stewart earned regional honors before being recognized as the national winner at an awards banquet in November.