Distinguished Faculty Advising Award

Dr. Leland Vail
Bob Cole Conservatory of Music

Dr. Leland Vail sets the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music to singing.

Over the past 16 years, he has advised Bachelor of Music students, Bachelor of Arts students, music minors, interdisciplinary majors and graduate music students. Currently Dr. Vail serves as the undergraduate adviser for the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music.

The undergraduate music curriculum is one of the most complex at CSULB, with five options and seven concentrations – each with different course requirements. Dr. Vail has become highly effective at tracking each student’s progress and ensuring each stays on track in both major and GE classes. Since he became the music adviser, the amount of time it takes students to graduate has dropped significantly.

Dr. Vail meets with every student at least once a semester and is known to greet them with a song with clever lyrics that rhyme. He spends about six hours a day meeting with the 400 or more music students and, in addition, helps prospective students prepare for auditions and determine the correct major track before they arrive at CSULB.

Dr. Vail sets high standards for academic advising and is highly respected by faculty, staff and administrators. He is seen by colleagues in the Conservatory as an expert on curriculum. He has helped identify curricular bottlenecks and issues that have slowed students’ academic progress.

At the university level, he has served on the Highly Valued Degree Initiative Advising Task Force that met regularly from 2009-2011 to craft a university-wide advising plan. In recent years his insight into the effects of university policy and his willingness to ask difficult questions has ensured that many changes, such as the Timely Graduation Policy, did not create unnecessary burdens on already busy advisers.

A faculty member at CSULB since 1976, Dr. Vail also serves as the music director of the Forty-Niner Chorus with more than 100 singers. The ensemble combines with the Chamber Choir, the University Choir and the University Symphony Orchestra to perform master works. Vail has conducted each of these choirs and taught choral repertoire, choral organization and conducting.

Academic Affairs Award for Outstanding Faculty Mentor for Student Engagement in Research, Scholarly & Creative Activity

Dr. Stephen Mezyk
Chemistry and Biochemistry

Dr. Stephen Mezyk’s success as a faculty mentor is evident in the achievements of his students.

Dr. Mezyk encourages his graduate and undergraduate students to present their research at national conferences such as the American Chemical Society Conferences (ACS). Kimberly Johnston, the 2012 Outstanding Graduate from the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, has presented her research at three different ACS Conferences and is now working to publish each of her four projects in peer-reviewed journals. His graduate student, Thomas Cullen, recently presented his research at the MARC IX conference in Kona, Hawaii, following his Department of Energy workshop presentation in Chicago last November. His presentation inspired several scientists present to offer him an opportunity to pursue a doctorate and career at the Idaho National Laboratory. And Kimberly Rickman credits Dr. Mezyk with helping her secure full funding to attend the Tri-Institutional MD-Ph.D. program at Cornell University.

Along with Johnston, Cullen and Rickman, Dr. Mezyk, a physical chemist with interests in energy and the environment, has worked with an extensive group of research students. In the past 18 months, his six graduate students, 18 undergraduates and 12 student laboratory volunteers have all been highly successful in the number of awards and scholarships they have won, the number of articles they have co-authored, and the national and international conferences at which they have presented.

Since joining the university in 2001, Dr. Mezyk has developed a successful system to oversee his research students’ academic and progress. All students get an individual research project and become actively involved in all aspects of the work, even when it involves traveling to state-of-the-art facilities throughout the country. Dr. Mezyk is fully involved in his students’ projects, ensuring that each one provides a valuable learning experience.

Over the past 18 months, he has worked with his students to help them obtain over $34,000 in research-based scholarships; and on 16 of his peer-reviewed publications there have been 12 CSULB student authors.

“I find it incredibly rewarding to see all of my students become confident, independent, critical thinkers, enjoying our mutual enthusiasm for science,” Dr. Mezyk said.