

Paula Dronen Receives Michigan Advising Award

Andrews professor recognized for excellence

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By: Tiffany Steinweg

In May, the state of Michigan recognized Paula Dronen, associate professor of architecture, with the 2017 MIACADA Outstanding Advising Award—an honor which no Andrews University professor has ever before received. She was chosen from among more than 250 of the most competent advising professors in the state.

“I feel blessed to be presented with such heartfelt appreciation from students, colleagues and now the state as well,” Dronen says.

At past advising conferences the MIACADA has honored outstanding faculty advisors from other colleges including Michigan State University, Western Michigan University, Grand Valley State University and Oakland University, but this is the first time an Andrews faculty member has been selected. Each year, three individuals from different categories are nominated in keeping with high standards of excellence such as strong interpersonal skills; frequency of contact and availability to advisees, faculty and staff; evidence of student success rate; mastery of institutional regulations, policies and procedures; caring and helpful attitude toward advisees, faculty and staff; and meeting advisees in informal settings.

“Paula brings strong communication skills to our program, advising between 80 and 90 students each academic year at both the undergraduate and graduate level,” said Carey Carscallen, dean of the School of Architecture & Interior Design, in his nomination. “Her attention to detail, knowledge of university policy, systematic review of student records, and consistent student meetings ensure a solid academic advising plan for those pursuing architecture and interior design.”

Long before the state became aware, Paula was inspiring and touching lives all around her with not only excellence in advising, but also personal interest and care for each and every student and co-worker she has interacted with in her 17 years at Andrews.

“Paula has always set the highest bar for her advising because she cares about all of our students,” says Rhonda Root, fellow architecture professor at Andrews. “It is great that others now know what we have known for a long time—that we work with the best.”

The true test of a great advisor, though, is the testimony of those they have advised.

A student advisee expressed how “Professor Dronen is ready and willing to help whenever needed. She motivates you to achieve and is willing to help you however she can. She makes a point to recognize you outside of the architecture department.”

Many others have also shared their sincere appreciation for her genuine attitude and desire to help however she can. One student expressed, “My life would definitely not be the same without Professor Dronen in it. She is a blessing from God.”

Keeping track of 80–90 individual advisees along with the duties of teaching architecture and pre-law classes just begins to scratch the surface of Dronen’s various responsibilities at work—not to mention the privileges and duties of home life with her husband, John, and their four children. When asked how she does such a great job advising, Dronen replied, “Well, I’m not sure that I always do a great job, but I do my best to be consistent. There is always something to learn.”

She continues, “Academic advising, at its core, is much more than having a lot of knowledge. It’s about having empathy. Being able to meet students where they’re at, offering suggestions while instilling ownership, listening more than speaking, showing kindness with candor, celebrating achievement and learning from perceived failures—these things are what I consider to be the ‘heart’ of advising.”

During her own college years, Dronen experienced the joy of having an advisor who made all the difference in her experience as a student, and she brings that experience into every advising session, recalling what it is like to sit on the other side of the desk.

It is obvious to all who know her that advising students is one of Dronen’s favorite responsibilities at Andrews, and praying with them the very highlight of her job.

“Recognizing that God has made each student unique, having both gifts and challenges, and never being tempted to exercise a one-size-fits-all approach is essential to the art of good academic advising,” says Dronen.

It is clear that her success and award have come as a result of much diligence and effort, yes, but also the faith and the legacy Dronen has embraced from her own academic advisor.

“I’m not at all convinced that I do these things well all of the time, but I know that the Lord is patient with me,” she concludes. “This award is every bit my own advisor, Bill “Doc” Davidson’s, award, and I’m blessed to be a part of it.”

Related Links

- [Read Paula Dronen's story](#) about Doc Davidson from her own student years
- [School of Architecture & Interior Design](#)
- [Going LIVE in the SAID Clinic Container](#)

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