



# BEST SHOULD TEACH

— Lecture & Awards Ceremony —

**March 5, 2026 | 6-7:30 p.m.**

**Chancellor's Hall and Auditorium,**

**Center for Academic Success and Engagement (CASE)**

*Co-sponsored by the College of Arts and Sciences,  
Center for Teaching & Learning, School of Education, and  
Brian Good with the Best Should Teach Initiative.*



University of Colorado **Boulder**

## **PROGRAM**

### **Welcome**

Kirk Ambrose, Founding Director of the Center for Teaching & Learning

### **2026 Best Should Teach Lecture:**

Mollie Blackburn, professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning in the College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University

### **Gold Awards | CU Boulder Faculty**

### **Gold Awards | Public School Teachers**

### **Silver Awards | Lead Graduate Teachers**

### **The Best Should Teach Recitation**

### **Reception**

## Mollie Blackburn



**Mollie Blackburn** is a professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning in the College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University. Her research focuses on literacy, language and social change, with particular attention to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) youth and the teachers who serve them.

She has published in journals such as *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Research in the Teaching of English*, and *Teachers College Record*, among others. She is the author

of “Interrupting Hate: Homophobia in Schools and what Literacy Can Do About It” and the co-editor of “Acting Out!: Combating Homophobia through Teacher Activism,” which received the Phillip C. Chinn Book Award, the Richard A. Meade Award, and the American Library Association’s CHOICE Book Award.

She has received WILLA’s (Women in Life and Literature Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English) Inglis Award for her work in the areas of gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, and young people; the Queer Studies special interest group of the American Educational Research Association’s award for a body of work; and the Alan C. Purves Award for an article in the *Research in the Teaching of English* deemed rich with implications for classroom practice.

### Keynote Lecture: (For)Giving in Moving Across Differences

Based on a teacher research project conducted in an LGBTQ+-themed literature course in a queer-friendly high school, this talk explores how students and teachers moved across differences by troubling the notion of forgiveness and embracing the act of giving. The goal of this movement was to share ethical encounters, where we were, at least sometimes, open, vulnerable, responsible and responsive.

## Heidi Day



### Teaching Professor, Neuroscience

As an undergraduate, Heidi Day studied pharmacology at the University of Bath (England). Day completed her PhD at Parke-Davis Neuroscience Research Center/ University of Cambridge in 1994, studying gut-brain interactions with John Hughes. Her planned two-year adventure in the United States turned into a happy five years as a post-doctoral research associate at the University of Michigan, researching the neurobiology of stress with Huda Akil. She continued research in this

field at CU Boulder from 1999 to 2014, first as a research associate and later as a research assistant professor. By 2014, the neuroscience major had been approved, and Day started teaching full-time in the Psychology and Neuroscience Department.

Over the past twelve years, Day has been lucky to teach in a supportive environment with amazing colleagues and students! She has developed and taught the Lab Techniques in Neuroscience course, which allows her to spend time in a lab environment with a teaching team of graduate teaching assistants and undergraduate learning assistants. She has also taught upper division elective courses in Neuropharmacology and Neurobiology of Stress. Most recently, Day taught a new course, Exploring the Neuroscience Major, which aims to help first-year students navigate being a student on campus and pique interest in neuroscience as a major. She is currently a teaching professor and director of the neuroscience major. The transition to the Bachelor of Science degree this fall is an exciting and welcome change for the students, and she looks forward to our major continuing to grow and develop.

“Heidi provides us with the tools to succeed in her course and to succeed once we leave. Heidi isn’t simply an academic teacher, she is someone that I can look up to, someone that I can just chat with about anything, and someone who makes coming to class just a little bit easier. She is truly amazing.”

— Student nomination

### Erin Furtak



#### Professor, STEM Education

Erin Furtak is a Professor of STEM Education in the School of Education. Furtak works in deep partnership with teachers and school districts to study the design and enactment of reform-oriented science curriculum materials and assessments. During her 18 years at CU Boulder, Furtak has taught across undergraduate, MA and PhD programs.

Furtak provides extensive mentorship to graduate students entering the profession, and her classes are sought out by students both within and beyond the School of Education. Building routines for students to find their own voices, to consider the communities to which they most want to speak in their writing and to establish healthy and sustainable routines that support their writing practice.

After receiving a BA in Environmental, Population and Organismic Biology at CU Boulder, Furtak studied teaching at the University of Denver, after which she began her career as a biology and earth science teacher in Jefferson County. Her curiosity about how students learn and finding more effective science teaching strategies led her to pursue doctoral studies at Stanford University.

Raised in a family of educators, Furtak seeks to enact humanizing pedagogies in all of her courses, to deeply know and provide thoughtful feedback and support to students as they complete the university studies and beyond. Furtak is also a constant learner, participating in the Lighthouse Writers Book Project program as she grows her own writing practice and community. Beyond campus, you'll find Furtak running the trails around her hometown of Golden, hanging out with her family, or writing in the shed her father built in her backyard.

“She drew connections across fields, shared lessons from her own mentors, and even offered stories about reaching out to scholars outside her discipline. Hearing those experiences encouraged me to do the same, and the person I contacted ended up responding.”

— Student nomination

### Danielle Hodge



#### Assistant Professor, Communication

Danielle Hodge is an Assistant Professor of Communication, a 2024-2025 Andrew W. Mellon Civic Engagement and Voting Rights Teacher Scholar, and the 2024-2025 Center for African and African American Studies (CAAAS) Faculty Fellow at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Her research employs a critical race theoretical approach to identity, culture and language, and bridges Communication and African American Studies to examine how systems of oppression are discursively reproduced, maintained and resisted. Her work can be found in the *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, *Critical Discourse Studies*, *Communication Teacher*, *Communication and Democracy* and the *Journal of Applied Communication Research*.

“In her classroom, learning is not simply the transfer of information. Rather, it is an invitation to grow, question, challenge, and better understand the world and ourselves. She holds the flame “as high as she can reach,” not only by teaching difficult and necessary subjects like race and anti-Black racism with clarity and compassion but by creating a space where students feel empowered to engage deeply with them.”

— Student nomination

### Akhil Khanal



#### Assistant Teaching Professor, Biochemistry

Akhil Khanal is an Assistant Teaching Professor in the Department of Biochemistry at University of Colorado Boulder. His training in enzymology allows him to teach classes in General Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, Biochemistry and Pharmacology. In many of his classes, often one of the central themes of discussion is: “What experiments can we design to gain the knowledge we are learning in lecture today.” In essence, he aims to nurture students to think like scientists.

His desire to teach stems from his experience with fantastic teachers during his undergraduate years at Ithaca College. This is where his teaching beliefs were first sculpted and the importance of teaching engendered. Since then, he has strived to provide a nurturing environment where understanding of complex content, curiosity, critical thought and practical applicability prevail.

Khanal is recognized particularly by his informal and conversational teaching style. He strives to *talk* to his audience even in lecture halls with an occupancy of 450 students. Doing so, he has found, makes the class exciting, the students more engaging and receptive to learning. Over his teaching career, he has mentored many students for success not only in his classes, but also success in college and graduate school.

“Dr. Khanal’s teaching has shown me that I am capable of accomplishing remarkably challenging tasks. When I think back to just a couple of months ago, I remember how nervous I was to take [organic chemistry]. I was worried that I would not be able to fully grasp the material and that I would quickly fall behind. However, his frequent reminders that success is possible through consistent work has reshaped the way I view challenges.”

— Student nomination

### Bhuvana Narasimhan



#### Professor, Linguistics

Bhuvana Narasimhan is a professor in the Linguistics department and faculty fellow in the Institute of Cognitive Science. Her research explores crosslinguistic diversity in how meaning is encoded, for instance, using large-scale comparative studies to explore the encoding of everyday events in different languages. She also investigates how children acquire the meanings and grammatical forms in their language, exploring their acquisition of the language of space, motion, causation and event participants in understudied languages, such as Tamil and Hindi. A third line of inquiry in her work is the relationship between language and mind, focusing on domains such as motion and number.

Narasimhan teaches a number of courses relating to meaning-making processes that connect language, mind, and body. In her teaching, she aims to create an interactive and collaborative environment in which students learn interdisciplinary ways of thinking and acquire the skills to apply abstract concepts to data of different kinds. She is also particularly committed to expanding learning opportunities to contexts outside the classroom by involving undergraduate students in hands-on research spanning different disciplines. Her students have worked on a variety of collaborative projects including children’s number development, the properties of maternal child-directed speech and narrative structures in different languages. These team-based projects provide students with research training as well as ample opportunities for informal mentoring, professional socialization and networking in inclusive contexts, positioning them well for creative and fulfilling careers in the future.

“She has taught me the power of critical thinking, iteration, collaboration, and patience—and has done it all with a box of cookies and words of encouragement in hand. I truly cannot overemphasize how much more equipped I feel to handle the world as a direct result of working with Bhuvana, and I cannot thank her enough.”

— Student nomination

### Meghan McCarroll



**Assistant Teaching Professor,  
Masters of the Environment**

Meghan McCarroll is a dedicated community-engaged scholar with a passion for integrating environmental and social systems. She earned her master's from the University of Queensland and her PhD from the University of Denver, where her research explored how to increase community engagement within municipal water management. She specifically focused on arid regions, where water is scarce and every drop matters.

Her research spanned Colorado to Queensland, Australia, to the Western Cape of South Africa, centering the lived experience of drought in water communications, education and participatory practices.

As a CU Alumna, McCarroll is thrilled to teach within the Environmental Studies Department, the same department where she started her career in higher education as an undergraduate. She acts as the Core Curriculum Faculty Lead for the Masters of the Environment program, helping her students build a scientific foundation to tackle the world's many environmental challenges. She centers a hands-on approach in her lessons where students take control of their education by applying class lessons to projects that best fit their specific career interests. She also structures interactive environments that allow students to share their a priori knowledge and learn from each other. Beyond the core curriculum, McCarroll also teaches students how to communicate complex scientific topics through compelling narratives and visualizations.

“One of the qualities I appreciate most is that Meghan meets people where they are and supports them from that point without judgment. She creates an environment where students feel comfortable engaging fully, asking questions, and stretching themselves. Because of that, she has had a profoundly positive impact on every student who wants to learn, including me.”

— Student nomination

### Ace Engelmann



**English Language Arts teacher at Boulder High School, Boulder Valley School District**

Ace Engelmann is a ninth grade English Language Arts teacher at Boulder High School, who is a deeply student-centered educator whose practice blends intellectual rigor with profound care. He is known for seeing the whole student and creating classrooms where young people feel safe to take risks, make mistakes, and grow. Through practices like the daily “spoon count,” Engelmann normalizes fluctuating

capacity, tracks student well-being over time, and responds with empathy rather than punishment. His routines—free-writes, whip-arounds, community circles and multiple participation pathways—ensure every voice is heard and valued, helping even the most hesitant students develop confidence and agency.

Engelmann is also a trusted mentor who supports colleagues through reflective dialogue, collaborative learning and a willingness to make his own practice public. His leadership extends beyond the classroom as the sponsor of the school's GSA, where he provides life-affirming support for queer and trans youth and helps create spaces of belonging. Engelmann embodies the ideals of the Best Should Teach Award: outstanding pedagogy, courage, care and a steadfast commitment to inclusive, humanizing education.

“As a mentor, Ace supports professional growth and personal development, cultivating relationships grounded in mutual respect and care. Ace is widely regarded as a trusted mentor within the English department and beyond and is known for fostering confidence and curiosity in new teachers through encouragement, reflection and dialogue.”

— CU Boulder faculty and teacher candidate student nomination

## Valerie Franzke-Munro



**Science teacher at Northglenn High School, Adams 12 Five Star Schools**

Valerie Franzke-Munro has been a high science teacher for 22 years and for the last 13 years has been a Chemistry and Environmental Science Teacher at Northglenn High School in Adams 12 Five Star Schools. She is an exceptional educator and mentor whose impact extends far beyond her own classroom. She has mentored multiple year-long CU Teach student teachers and supported several CU Boulder undergraduate

licensure candidates, offering a level of guidance that is both professionally rigorous and deeply humane. Franzke-Munro is known for supporting candidates through the challenges, helping them develop strong instructional practice while also sustaining their well-being. Her mentorship continues after graduation, as she supports CU Teach alumni at Northglenn High School and serves as a common course leader in her department and has been on several science committees at the district level, helping align curriculum with the Next Generation Science Standards.

In the classroom, Franzke-Munro exemplifies research-based, equity-driven science instruction. She creates welcoming, intellectually rich learning environments where all students are invited to engage in authentic sense-making. She believes that her most important job is getting students excited about science and giving them the confidence to believe in themselves and their abilities. Her mentorship for high school students and students from CU is transformative and rooted in trust, honest feedback, and opportunities to grow, and she embodies the belief that the best should teach.

“As a former high school chemistry teacher myself, I wish more students were given the opportunity to learn physical science content from such a caring, kind, and thoughtful individual as Val. She exemplifies that the Best Should Teach (Chemistry!).”

— CU Boulder faculty nomination

## Abby Martinez



**Middle school music teacher at Erie Middle School, St. Vrain Valley Schools**

Abby Martinez is a teacher, performer, clinician and a conductor from Grand Junction. A 2006 Boettcher Scholar, she earned her Bachelor of Music Education from CU Boulder. Martinez’s true passion lies in directing the Erie Middle School Choir program, where she has been teaching since 2010. She conducts nearly 400 students daily in three mixed, non-auditioned grade-level choirs and four varied extracurricular choirs. Her

program has performed nationally in Nashville, Orlando, Chicago and New York. She is a two-time St. Vrain Valley School District Teacher of the Year, a 2025 GRAMMY Music Educator Quarterfinalist and a 2026 GRAMMY Legacy recipient. Her choirs thrive because of the strong structures she has built: purposeful warm-ups, clear rehearsal formats, student leadership roles, thoughtful repertoire selection and a deep sense of community.

For more than a decade, Martinez has welcomed practicum students and student teachers into her classroom, offering guidance and a living model of what excellent, community-centered music teaching looks like. She is an extraordinary mentor whose impact on future educators has shaped the quality and sustainability of music education in our region. She fosters open reflection and honest conversations about teaching, giving new educators access to the kind of experiential learning that research identifies as essential for developing a strong practice.

Martinez believes every child deserves the space to be their authentic self and that together we can use music to make a positive change in our communities and our world.

“She values a sense of community that fosters open discussion about rehearsal methods, student growth and teaching strategies. This kind of peer-oriented or mentor-oriented culture helps teachers develop faster and more sustainably, and we simply could not prepare future teachers without Abby Martinez.”

— CU Boulder faculty nomination

### Vicky Ortiz



**Fourth grade Spanish environment teacher at Foster Dual Language PK-8 School, Jeffco Public Schools**

Vicky Ortiz's path to this stage began in Durango, Mexico, and was forged through a journey of relentless perseverance. Ortiz was a teenager when she and her siblings immigrated and were reunited with their father in Chicago.

When a workplace injury later relocated her family to the agricultural fields of Merced County, California, she said she learned the true meaning of hard work while laboring in the sugar beet and cotton rows. Despite the physical demands of the fields, Ortiz's commitment to education never wavered. She navigated the California higher education system from Merced Community College to Cal State Stanislaus, eventually graduating from CSU Dominguez Hills.

Life eventually brought Ortiz and her family to Colorado, where she chose to turn a period of transition into an opportunity for growth. She said returning to school at CU Boulder to complete her teacher licensure and Master's degree was a turning point that defined her professional career. Today, as a proud resident of Colorado and fourth grade teacher at Foster Dual Language PK-8 School, she carries the lessons of the fields and the resilience of her youth into her work every day. She said she is deeply grateful to her community, her principal, her family and to the University of Colorado Boulder for this honor, which stands as a testament to the power of family, education and the enduring spirit of the immigrant journey.

### Paula Ospina



**ELA-S Literacy teacher at College View Elementary School, Denver Public Schools**

Paula Ospina, Senior Teach Lead and third grade Literacy Teacher at College View Elementary School, is a deeply skilled educator and coach whose work has transformed both student learning and teacher practice. Over her nine years at College View, she has taught kindergarten and third grade, led multilingual learner supports and become a trusted instructional leader. In her classroom, Ospina creates a warm, rigorous learning community where students feel safe, valued and motivated to excel. Her literacy instruction is grounded in research, responsive to data and intentionally designed so that every learner—regardless of language background or starting point—can access grade-level content and experience meaningful growth. Students in her class take academic risks, engage in rich discussions and consistently make above-average progress.

As an instructional coach, Ospina brings the same blend of expertise and empathy. She mentors teachers, student teachers, and paraprofessionals with clarity, high expectations, and genuine care. Colleagues rely on her for thoughtful analysis, collaborative planning and modeling of effective strategies that lead to measurable improvements in instruction and student outcomes. Her leadership has strengthened literacy across the third-grade team and the school as a whole.

Ospina is a reflective, equity-driven educator whose dedication, professionalism and belief in the power of literacy make her an invaluable leader and a deserving recipient for recognition.

“What truly sets Paula apart is her growth into a supportive and driven instructional coach. In this role, Paula has become a trusted partner to teachers and student teachers, offering thoughtful guidance, actionable feedback, and encouragement rooted in respect and collaboration.”

— Denver Public Schools instructional coach nomination

## 2025-26 BEST SHOULD TEACH SILVER AWARD WINNERS

### Lead Graduate Teachers

#### Arts & Humanities

Annika Armstrong, English  
Lauren Breen, College of Music  
Nicholas Felder, College of Music  
Harveen Gill, Dance  
Lux Kickapoo-Johnson, English  
Kaz Mirfattahi, Theatre  
Ana Nedochoetko, Religious Studies  
Acacia Oyler, Classics  
Luis Perez, Art Practices  
Tyler Porter, Philosophy  
Lena Rodriguez, Art History  
Emily Swertfeger, History

#### Communication, Media, Design and Information

Ula Adamska, Communication  
Muhammad Ali, Journalism  
Div Kumar Singh, Information Science  
Brook Vann, Critical Media Practices

#### Engineering

Alli Cook, Environmental Engineering  
Amanda Hernandez Sandate, Computer Science  
Chun-Wei Kong, Aerospace Engineering  
Daniel Ethridge, ATLAS  
Zach Meduna, Chemical and Biological Engineering  
Kayla Rasavanh, Mechanical Engineering  
Bhargav Shandilya, Computer Science  
Carolus Vitalis, Biomedical Engineering Program

#### Languages & Literatures

Sean Ang, Asian Languages and Civilizations  
Juliette Andre, French and Italian

Haruka Fujii, Asian Languages and Civilizations  
Ben Kirchoff, German  
Brandy Valdez, Spanish and Portuguese  
Maria Vazquez, Spanish and Portuguese

#### Sciences & Mathematics

Levi Barksdale, Applied Mathematics  
Kayla Cormier, Speech Language Hearing Sciences  
Cinea Jenkins, Mathematics  
Tina Geller, Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences  
Bri Hibner, Geology  
Maggie Huber, Astrophysical and Planetary Sciences  
Ben Kott, Integrative Physiology  
Annie Meeder, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology  
Emma Opper, Applied Mathematics  
Helen Wilson Burns, Environmental Studies  
Brittany Wu, Molecular, Chemical and Developmental Biology

#### Social Sciences

Kate Arnold-Murray, Linguistics  
Jon Cohen, Political Science  
Sina Davoudi, Business  
Kelsi Faley, Sociology  
Matthew Gee, Ethnic Studies  
Loraine Glidewell, School of Education  
Naomi Hazarika, Geography  
Danielle Parks, Economics  
Lynneatte Quenin, Psychology and Neuroscience

Departments in the Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities annually select one outstanding graduate instructor to serve as a Lead Graduate Teacher. Each Lead has received extensive training on college pedagogy, academic leadership, management, and professional development and then train peer graduate instructors on these topics. They perform videotape observations, micro-teaching sessions, lead workshops on teaching that are specific to their discipline, and help other graduate instructors complete the requirements for the Certificate in College Teaching.

## **The Best Should Teach Initiative**

The Best Should Teach Initiative strives to acknowledge excellence in teaching and academic leadership. The Center for Teaching & Learning manages the initiative in coordination with the School of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences. The late Lindley and Marguerite Stiles established the initiative in 1996 to promote the ideal that “The Best Should Teach.” A Best Should Teach sculpture, designed by John Haertling, which represents the flame of enlightenment, serves as a visual reminder of the initiative and of the importance of teaching and academic leadership. The School of Education supports the Best Should Teach Initiative by giving Best Should Teach Gold Awards to outstanding teachers in its partner districts. The Best Should Teach Gold Awards also honor outstanding faculty on the Boulder campus and Silver Awards honor Lead Graduate Teachers.

## **Colleges and Universities with Best Should Teach Initiatives**

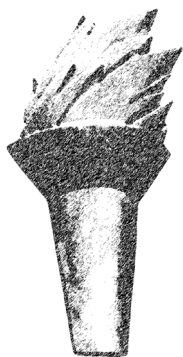
University of Colorado Boulder, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Eastern Kentucky University, and Fort Lewis College

## **Lindley J. Stiles**

University of Colorado Boulder alumnus Lindley J. Stiles was a lifelong educator who died at age 94 in 2008. He held high-level academic positions, including deanships at the University of Virginia and the University of Wisconsin and a professorship at Northwestern University. Stiles was a policymaker, instrumental in the Brown v. Board of Education 1954 Supreme Court decision, and was known for his advocacy on behalf of underrepresented students. He believed the most gifted scholars should inform others through teaching. Stiles considered teaching to be the ultimate profession because it nourishes all the others.

## **Ira and Ineva Reilly Baldwin**

Ira and Ineva Reilly Baldwin were friends and mentors of Stiles and generous supporters of education, contributing to the Best Should Teach fund on multiple occasions. Their gifts established an endowment to create the Best Should Teach Lecture.



To those to come, I leave the flame!

Hold it as high as you can reach.

If a better world is your aim,

All must agree:

**The Best Should Teach”**

—*Lindley Stiles*

To support teacher education at CU Boulder, please send your gift to:

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For questions, contact Micah Abram at  
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