CITATION

February 29, 2021

In keeping with the resolve of the Mathematical Association of America to take substantive action each year to honor extraordinarily successful teaching at all post-secondary levels, its Golden Section is pleased to identify

NICOLETTE C. MESHKAT

as the recipient of its sectional award for a

DISTINGUISHED TEACHER
OF COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY MATHEMATICS

Prof. Nicolette Meshkat (Nikki) excels in teaching and research in mathematical modeling and in teaching courses about statistics. These areas are closely related in their current and potential applications, particularly to biology, but their techniques differ significantly. This citation is mostly based on student responses.

Prof. Meshkat's students in both subjects praise her teaching profusely. A former statistics student, now doing graduate work in data science, described her as "the best mathematics professor I have ever had throughout my time in Santa Clara University." That judgment is enhanced by a comment from the chairman of the department: "it is filled with extraordinary, popular teachers." (Six of them are previous winners of this award!) Another student, asked what practice Nikki should continue, answered simply, "Being happy!" A third commented, "Whoever gets you as a professor is blessed!"

After undergraduate and doctoral study in applied and pure mathematics at the Universities of California at Berkeley and Los Angeles, Nikki held a temporary position at Santa Clara University for a year, then a postdoctoral research and teaching fellowship for three years at North Carolina State University, working with one of the leaders in her field.

Santa Clara beckoned again, and Nikki returned there as assistant professor in 2015. She continued intense research activity, helping to organize several symposia with Nationwide participation, presenting more than thirty invited talks, and co-authoring eight papers in major journals and conference proceedings.

Along with teaching the standard courses at Santa Clara, Nikki designed new ones close to her specialty: calculus for life sciences and, most recently, advanced modeling. Until the latter was developed, interested students could only pursue individual supervised study. Besides that, Nikki provided expert consultation to advanced students at nearby San Jose State University and at the Bay Area Discrete Mathematics conferences.

Nikki is a popular instructor in upper-division statistics courses, although that's not her specialty. One of her Santa Clara students, a bioengineering major, learning that Nikki's research was really based on advanced abstract mathematics, took two courses of that sort, then proposed an independent study project in mathematical biology. The student reports,

> Nikki has been an amazing mentor for me as an undergraduate researcher ... she appreciated my background in computer science and pushed me to improve my programming skills.

Nikki's instruction and counsel led to that student's immediately obtaining a position at a research laboratory. She has also started graduate study in data science and claims,

> The theoretical understanding I gained from Nikki's classes aids my intuition and helps me avoid falling into the trap of seeing statistics as disconnected formulas.

We are proud to present the 2020 Golden Section Award for a Distinguished Teacher of College or University Mathematics to Nicolette Meshkat, an exceptionally effective mathematics researcher and teacher.