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Application Summary

Competition Details

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Application Information

Submitted By: Christie Stewart

Application ID: 9802

Application Title: Adam Decker Undergraduate Educator Award Nomination

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Personal Details

Applicant First Name: Christie

Applicant Last Name: Stewart

Email Address: christie.stewart@ap.gatech.edu

Phone Number: (404) 385-4711

Primary School or Department

School of Biological Sciences

Primary Appointment Title: Senior Academic Professional

Application Details

Proposal Title

Adam Decker Undergraduate Educator Award Nomination

February 5, 2023

Dear Selection Committee,

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter on behalf of the Biological Sciences Teaching Awards Committee nominating Dr. Adam Decker for the Undergraduate Educator Award. Dr. Decker embodies the criteria for this distinguished award. He serves as a Senior Academic Professional in the School of Biological Sciences, teaching Human Anatomy, Anatomy Lab, Human Pathology, and Scientific Foundations of Health. Adam continues to demonstrate innovation in his classes, mentors students interested in the medical profession, shows compassion and concern for his students, and is intentional in the approach used for health and well-being education to empower students to prioritize self-care and become critical health consumers. Dr. Decker has a strong commitment to undergraduate instruction and challenges students while supporting their learning.

Dr. Decker demonstrates teaching excellence through innovative pedagogical approaches in both core and highly technical courses. To Dr. Decker, human anatomy is more than merely the memorization of systems and structure of the human body. He ensures the students advance their knowledge for the effective application of the information gained from the course. For example, during the cardiac section of the course, he has a male student voluntarily come to the front of the class. Dr. Decker takes a dry erase marker and physically outlines the exact location of the heart using the anatomical landmarks discussed during class. Once the outline is finished, he has the student make a fist and hold it up to the shape drawn on the chest. This allows the students to visualize the heart's precise location in the chest. In addition, Dr. Decker recently worked with Emory School of Medicine to bring human cadaveric specimens to labs on Georgia Tech's campus.

Secondly, as the Institute Wellness requirement (APPH 1040 and APPH 1050) features large student sections (150-300 students per class) and content often not directly related to the student's major, students may begin the semester unengaged in the course and proposed material. Dr. Decker challenges himself to find a way to produce meaningful, practical content to expose the students to all dimensions of health and well-being as it relates to their academic success and self-care. He also includes real-world health and pathology-related anecdotes that aid in increasing student engagement and interest in the course topics.

Lastly, Dr. Decker continues to investigate courses that add to the School of Biological Sciences curriculum and those who may be interested in pursuing a career in health professions and/or public health. Throughout the past several years he developed and received approval for the Human Pathology course. Dr. Decker is continually coming up with innovative ways to bridge the connection between the textbook learning of pathology and hands-on clinical pathological processes. For example, he brought his portable exam table to class and completed a work-up (case study) on a pretend patient with appendicitis. He teaches the students the correct sequence and methods to conduct an examination and diagnosis. They then watch a video of a CT scan and an appendectomy. The students have enjoyed the practical application of this process, thus far in the course.

Dr. Decker develops meaningful mentor/mentee relationships with our students at Georgia Tech. He is extremely active in the career exploration and development of his students. Dr. Decker serves as an advisor for the Human Physiology minor, students preparing to take the MCAT and DAT, and students exploring the mental, dental, and pharmacy professions. In addition, Dr. Decker serves as a supervisor/mentor to both undergraduate and graduate teaching assistants each semester. This includes developing effective teaching assistants/lab instructors for the anatomy lab, which can be quite an undertaking with the wealth of information and lab activities involved with the course. As you will hear in many of the student letters to follow, Dr. Decker has had a profound impact in student dedication to teaching and career exploration.

Dr. Decker provides a safe and caring learning environment for sensitive issues addressed in the wellness course. Specifically, in the Scientific Foundations of Health (APPH 1040) course, the wellness curriculum can bring up sensitive issues surrounding the student. Dr. Decker spends a great deal of time with students listening and recommending campus resources. While we all encounter students in distress, the sensitive nature of content in APPH 1040/1050 and volume of students who take the course each semester (1000+) causes Adam to dedicate a large amount of time meeting with students and following up to ensure they are pursuing the correct support resources and checking on their welfare. He genuinely cares about each student and offers himself as a resource and support system.

Dr. Decker is a highly valued member of the School of Biological Sciences and the Georgia Tech community. His commitment to innovative teaching, creating impactful experiences for students, and mentorship is evident to all faculty, staff, and students with whom he works. Dr. Decker remains committed to the constant improvement of the curriculum within his courses and the development of opportunities to increase engagement of students in the classroom. His dedication to Georgia Tech, the field of health professions, student-centered teaching and learning, and professional development is inspiring to all that have the opportunity to work with him. For all of these reasons, I believe Dr. Adam Decker is an outstanding choice for the Undergraduate Educator Award.

Sincerely,



Christie Stewart, PhD
Senior Academic Professional
Georgia Tech School of Biological Sciences



Endorsed by Dr. Todd Strelman
Chair, School of Biological Sciences

Nomination of Dr. Adam Decker for the 2023 Undergraduate Educator Award

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Reflective Statement on Teaching and Educational Innovation

Yes, I am the senior academic professional that can be seen traversing campus with a large leather case. If you see me carrying this case, I am most definitely on my way to an anatomy lecture where students eagerly await its contents. It could be a human skull, spinal column, reflex hammer, Littman stethoscope, neurological pinwheel, plastinated upper limb, or a femur bone. Whatever the contents, my 200+ anatomy students always enjoy holding, studying, and marveling at the objects that are passed around the class. My goal is to bring human anatomy alive all through the eyes of the clinical patient. On the days I bring my diagnostic instruments, I have a student volunteer come up in front of the class, and I methodically demonstrate and demystify such clinical instruments. For example, I use my reflex hammer to demonstrate the reflex arc by tapping the knee, triceps, and biceps, plus I use the pointed end of the reflex hammer to show the Babinski reflex on the sole of the foot, a critical neurological test that when positive indicates disease or trauma of the motor tracts of the spinal cord. It excites me when I can tie a concept they have learned in their previous neuroscience courses, like the reflex arc, and put that concept into clinical practice. I also utilize an innovative technique of physically drawing the heart's exact location on a student volunteer. I use all the chest wall landmarks previously introduced, such as intercostal spaces, sternal angle, and the xiphisternal junction. Since the human heart is the size of a clenched fist, once I have the heart outlined with my skin marking pencil, I have the student place their clenched fist within that outline. It is very satisfying to hear audible "gasps" coming from the class when they see how accurate the location is. While performing these live demonstrations and clinical tests, the students are quiet and on the edge of their seats. They don't want to miss a single moment of the physical exam. These lecture demonstrations give me great comfort in knowing I am not just helping our students to be good physicians but great physicians.

Anatomy has often been called the "oldest child of Mother Medicine." I continually remind my students that human anatomy is the cornerstone of all medical science. As an anatomical sciences educator, I feel my teaching should have students ask, "Why?" Why are heart valves shaped the way they are? Why is cerebrospinal fluid the clearest substance in the human body? These are the types of questions I field during every lecture. It is not uncommon to see when one student asks a "why" question, multiple hands go up. At that very moment, I know we are in for a great discussion and possibly a debate. "Why" questions tell me that the students are engaged and, most of all, fascinated. Fascination stems from a childlike inquisitiveness to know the essence of what is being studied. Bringing out that childlike curiosity is what makes my career as a Georgia Tech educator so fulfilling.

Cadaver dissection has always been the gold standard when teaching human anatomy. In the infancy of my anatomy course, I realized plastic models and images out of an anatomy atlas were adequate, but I wanted to give the students a real anatomy experience. I wanted my course to mimic what they would experience in their first year of medical school. I envisioned the course to be a bridge between undergraduate and graduate school. I needed to find a way to get actual cadaverous tissue onto campus in a safe manner. Little did I realize this lofty endeavor would take almost two years to come to fruition. The process began with a call for help to my Emory School of Medicine colleagues. Together, we figured out how to make this a reality. The process has been well documented in an article written in 2021 titled, ['Hands-on Anatomy: One Foot in Medical School, One Foot in Undergrad.'](#) In the agreement with Emory, I would personally go the medical school seven days a year and procure all the prosections through careful dissection. One *en bloc* prosection I wanted our students to be able to study was that of the brain and spinal cord in one complete unit, the entire central nervous system. This procedure typically takes me seven hours to dissect. The Emory medical faculty were so impressed with the specimen they asked me to procure the same specimen for their students and neurology residents. The Georgia Tech anatomy course is undoubtedly one of only a handful of undergraduate programs to have a diverse sample of cadaveric organs and tissues. I am incredibly grateful for the support the College of Sciences has given me in allowing me to work with Emory. Working with the medical school has given me insight into the

current working model of medical education. This knowledge has proven invaluable when I counsel our students on applying to medical school.

In 2018, while teaching *Scientific Foundations of Health* on the Georgia Tech Pacific Rim program, I had the opportunity to visit the Otago School of Medicine, located on the South Island of New Zealand. The medical school has a public anatomical museum that houses a large collection of anatomical specimens, models, and human oddities. One afternoon, while studying the pathology collection, I realized that human pathology would be a course that our students would find helpful and engaging. Combing through the Georgia Tech biology course offerings, I surmised we needed a clinical course that would offer our pre-health students not just the rigor found in medical school but a course devoted to actual clinical case studies. Upon returning home, I put pen to paper and outlined the major course topics. I referred to current pedagogical literature to come up with best practices for teaching graduate-level course material to undergraduate students. The following spring, *Human Pathology* was offered as BIOS4803, a special topics course. The course had an initial enrollment of 33 students. In 2021, I petitioned to have *Human Pathology* listed as a permanent course in the university course catalog. The elective course was approved and is now BIOS4440, with a current enrollment of 100+ students. Each spring, Dr. Doug Parker, lead pathology instructor at Emory, visits my class to cover case studies and to offer a glimpse into the life of a medical student. My proudest career moment came last spring when Dr. Parker asked my class technical questions regarding a particular cardiac case study, and my pathology students were confidently answering all his questions correctly! At the end of his lecture, he said, "Adam, if I didn't know these were undergraduate students, I would have thought I walked into a medical school pathology class."

Although my doctorate-level training as a clinician has proven invaluable to our students, I wanted to further my education as a medical educator. I am obtaining my Ph.D. in Medical Health and Professions Education from the Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, VA. This program has enabled me to reinvent myself as an educator in these changing times post-COVID. My research will focus on the lived experiences undergraduate students at a large urban university have in dissecting their first cadaver. I expect to complete the degree in 2025.

My primary focus in teaching our pre-health students is to make that transition from undergraduate to graduate school as painless as possible. My students will be armed with medical terminology, clinical insight, diagnostic skills, knowledge of radiographic anatomy, and, most importantly, respect for all diverse cultures. As future healthcare providers, knowing how to treat every patient with kindness and concern is what I teach my students throughout all my courses. I tell them that some individuals, not even born yet, will one day be on their exam table. My courses give students a sense of purpose, encouragement, and motivation to be the best healthcare provider they can be. That is why you see me proudly carrying that leather case around campus.

Illustrations of Teaching Excellence and Impact on Student Learning

Educational Outreach Beyond the Classroom and Laboratory.

- Coordinate and train several anatomy TAs to take some of our cadaver specimens to Cooper Middle School to demonstrate the deleterious effects of smoking, heart disease, alcoholism, and stroke.
- Invited by a group of Morehouse School of Medicine plastic surgery residents to join a panel to discuss biases found within plastic surgery as it relates to the minority population. The plan is to invite the residents to conduct a workshop teaching my anatomy students proper skin suturing techniques.
- Annually on Brain Awareness Day, I will teach elementary and middle school students utilizing the prosected human brains in the anatomy lab. It is always the highlight of the day.
- Volunteer in the gross anatomy lab, from December to May, at the Emory School of Medicine, teaching cadaver dissection to first-year medical school students. This unique experience helps me advise our students who plan on entering medical school.
- 15 days a year, I open the anatomy lab to 150+ campus students to show them the adverse effects of smoking, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and alcoholism.
- Each spring semester, I host three 90-minute meetings where I demonstrate a complete cardiac, abdominal, and chest physical exam. Following each exam, the students and I work through a mock case study to develop a diagnosis and treatment plan.

Current Service to the Institution

- Chair of the Student Academic and Financial Affairs Committee (SAFAC)
- Member of the Biology Undergraduate Curriculum Committee
- Faculty advisor to the minor in Physiology
- Faculty advisor/mentor:
 - o Buzzin' for Babies in conjunction with the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of the Southern Regional Medical Center
 - o Volunteers Around the World (veterinarian outreach branch)
 - o Emergency Medical Services at Georgia Tech Club
 - o Georgia Tech Eye and Vision Club

Awards and Recognition

- 2022- Student Recognition for Excellence in Teaching: Class of 1934 CIOS Honor Roll
- 2021- Student Recognition for Excellence in Teaching: Class of 1934 CIOS Honor Roll
- 2020- Recipient of the Georgia Tech Professor of Excellence award. Award money was donated to the anatomy lab.
- 2020- Recipient of the Student Recognition of Excellence in Teaching Award: Class of 1934
- 2019- Class of 1940 W. Roane Beard Outstanding Teaching Award.
- 2017- Georgia Tech Undergraduate Educator Award nominee.



One of the many hands-on lab activities I coordinate outside of class time. The above lab activity involved dissecting a human brain. The students are members of the Georgia Tech Neuroscience Club. The brain shown is a plastic model.



Teaching anatomy students the cranial nerves.

Human Pathology BIOS 4440 CIOS sample

Semester	Enthusiasm	Stimulates Interest	Overall Effectiveness
Spring 2022 (N=46; 56% response rate)	5.0	5.0	5.0
Spring 2021 (N=59; 69% response rate)	5.0	4.9	4.9
Spring 2019 (N=46; 89% response rate)	5.0	5.0	5.0
Course not offered Spring 2020			

Human Anatomy BIOS 3753 CIOS sample

Semester	Enthusiasm	Stimulates Interest	Overall Effectiveness
Fall 2022 (N=157; response rate 88%)	4.8	4.8	4.9
Spring 2022 (N=116; 88% response rate)	4.9	4.8	4.9
Fall 2021 (N=196; 88% response rate)	4.9	4.8	4.9

Scientific Foundations of Health APPH 1040 CIOS sample

Semester	Enthusiasm	Stimulates Interest	Overall Effectiveness
Summer 2022 (N=220; 75% response rate)	4.9	4.7	4.9
Summer 2021 (N= 195; 63% response rate)	4.9	4.7	4.9
Summer 2020 (N=122; 41% response rate)	4.9	4.8	4.9

Thank a Teacher Note Highlights

April 2022:

- 1- *Thank you for being so passionate about teaching and a key part of the pre-health community here at Tech! Without your classes, both anatomy and especially pathology, I undoubtedly would have struggled to remind myself of why I want to continue my medical education. I am so glad I was able to take pathology before I graduate, please continue offering the course to future students, it's truly the best class I have taken at Tech. I and so many other premed students truly appreciate you.*
- 2- *I'm graduating this May but want to thank Dr. Decker for giving students opportunities to learn anatomy and pathology content ahead of a medical career and making learning enjoyable. I feel that being an anatomy/pathology teaching assistant for the past two semesters has given me the necessary skills to pursue a career in academic medicine in the future. I've learned from his teaching style, incorporated it into helping other students, and understood the different ways to reach out to students so that they can effectively grasp the material. I have to thank Dr. Decker for being a good model in connecting with students and in giving students like me the opportunity to learn those "soft skills" before stepping out to graduate school. Overall, the GOAT professor and a great friend to students.*
- 3- *Dear Dr. Decker, I would like to thank you with all of my heart for the impact you have made on me as a student, a person, and my future progression into medicine. You have inspired me every single day. Your courses were the ones I would look forward to most and they put a smile on my face every time. I wish lectures could have been triple the time and every day of the week. I remember that after every class, I would go home with lit eyes eager to share the information I had just learned with my family and friends. Some of the best moments this semester were watching surgeries in class, especially the knee replacement and the abdominal aortic aneurysm repair. From pro-sections to lecture, I will forever cherish the information and skills I have learned from you and I am grateful to have had you as a mentor and a professor for several semesters. Thank you for everything, Dr. Decker!*

September 2022

- 1- *Dr. Decker is an awesome prof and role model, he teaches anatomy in a fun and passionate way. Taking and TA'ing his class is a big reason why I'm considering a career in academia in the future.*
- 2- *Thank you for the entertaining lectures and engaging classes! While physiology was never something I was super interested in, your applications have (genuinely) made a difference in how*

I view nutrition, health, happiness, and so much more. I am glad I now know the proper way to wash my hands too, and that I can name the recommended fiber intake for both men and women off the top of my head. We love you, Dr. Decker! Stay cool.

- 3- *I had a great time in APPH 1040 and enjoyed the experiences that you invited us to. Thanks for the advice after class, I'm sure it will help me for years to come. So far I've met a ton of intriguing professors, thanks for opening so well.*

Sample CIOS Responses:

BIOS 4440- Human Pathology

- *Dr. Decker is an exceptional professor, a true gem at Georgia Tech. Any student would be lucky to have Dr. Decker as an instructor. His charisma, fascination for the content, and expertise had me running to class each and every week. During the end of the course, I was genuinely upset that his class was coming to an end; I can never get enough. Dr. Decker inspires me every day and pushes me to further my knowledge and of medicine and I am forever grateful for that.*
- *Dr. Decker is the best professor at GT. He understands and cares about student success and understanding. He knows the goals of his students and tailors his courses to help students become the best they can be and to prepare them for their future careers. Dr. Decker has so many strengths including ability to break down difficult concepts, creating methods for student learning and understanding (like acronyms) transparency (telling students exactly what they need to know in order to succeed) flexibility and above and beyond care for students. He deserves so much recognition for his teaching ability and should be used as an example for how every professor at GT should be!!*
- *He is clearly very enthusiastic about pathology, and it makes the course that much better. I also like that he can explain complex processes/ ideas with simple language and diagrams that give a simple yet efficient understanding of the things that would otherwise be very confusing.*

APPH/BIOL 3753 – Human Anatomy

- *Dr. Decker clearly cares about his students and their success in the course. He is very passionate about the subject and it rubs off on the students.*
- *SO ENTHUSIASTIC! I actually loved making the 30 minute trek to the Paper Building to learn from Dr. Decker. I did not expect to actually find Anatomy interesting, but thanks to Dr. Decker I would consider myself to be passionate about the subject.*
- *Love this class. I would highly recommend it for anyone at gatech who is interested in learning about the human body*
- *His enthusiasm and love of Anatomy made me want to learn more for sure! It made going to lecture enjoyable, rather than a chore.*
- *Nothing can be done to improve the course--everything about it is perfect. The level of rigor is good, the quality of instruction is incredible, and the examinations reflect the amount of time a student put into studying. Everyone is capable of doing well in this class IF they prepare.*
- *The best aspect of the course was Dr. Decker! He is a wonderful lecturer, and he is very approachable. The class is very structured and everything is crystal clear. I really wish he taught physiology!*
- *His clinical background and clarity when discussing material made him a very effective teacher. It's clear Dr. Decker knows this material very well, and it helped when asking questions or when clarification was needed. He also made the class very fun, too, which always helps!*

- *Dr. Decker is clearly EXTREMELY knowledgeable on the content he is teaching. He is a very engaging lecturer. I really enjoyed when he tied in clinical applications for the anatomy we were learning.*

APPH 1040- Scientific Foundations of Health

- *Dr. Decker's teaching quality is exceptional and provides a great example of how college classes should be taught.*
- *HE WAS PROBABLY ONE OF MY FAVORITE PROFESSORS AFTER 4 YEARS AT GEORGIA TECH!!!! Dr. Decker made a subject as ""boring"" as health may seem be one of my favorite classes! He made the topic interesting by discussing aspects of health that were relevant to our lives (or interesting to college students) and he provided videos, guest speakers and assignments to augment to our interest and learning in the course! SO ENTHUSIASTIC IT MADE ME ENTHUSIASTIC TOO!!! And he was extremely funny which made it a joy to attend class.*
- *He has a natural teaching ability and knows how to relate personal stories that are funny, but also relate to the subject matter*
- *Dr. Decker made this class very interesting and made me want to change some aspects in my life after coming to lecture and doing specific assignments. It always makes a student want to attend class more and stay interested when they can tell that the professor is enthusiastic about the course*

Emails from Former Students Now in Medical School

Hello Dr. Decker,

I hope you're having a great first day back at Tech. I just started medical school at MCG at the end of July, and I just want you to know how helpful your classes have been to me, even in just the first four weeks. Pathology in particular gave me such a great foundational knowledge of terminology and disease states that has made me more confident when walking through clinical cases and understanding lecture material. Even just this morning, we were discussing congenital heart defects, and I was thinking back to your cardiology lectures to help explain concepts to my classmates. Your classes have been more helpful in medical school than any other undergrad classes I took, and the other Yellow Jackets at MCG with me agree. I hope you know how impactful your teaching has been, and I hope your current students know how lucky they are to be in your classes. Thank you for helping set me up for success, and have a great semester!!

Best,
Hannah Goodsite

Good Afternoon Dr. Decker,

This is Michael Assan from you Anatomy and Pathology classes from the 2018/2019 school year. You wrote me a letter of recommendation for medical school and I'm excited to let you know that I got accepted into PCOM-Ga and will be matriculation in August!

Thank you so much for everything Dr. Decker. You taught me so and fostered such an incredible passion for medicine and the human body!

I am extremely grateful Dr. Decker! Thank you!

Sincerely,
Michael E. Assan



School of Biological Sciences
Atlanta, Georgia 30332-0230 U.S.A.
PHONE 404-894-3700
FAX 404-894-0519

January 29, 2023

Dear Selection Committee:

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter in support of Dr. Adam Decker's nomination for the Undergraduate Educator Award at Georgia Tech. I have known Dr. Decker since 2010 when he joined our school as a part-time adjunct teaching APPH 1040, *Scientific Foundations of Health*. In 2014, he became a full-time Academic Professional and took on the added responsibility as the instructor and coordinator of BIOSC 3753, *Human Anatomy*.

Early in his career at Ga Tech, Adam began negotiations with Emory for a procurement agreement which allowed for the implementation of cadaver-based instruction in anatomy. This entailed not only collaboration with Emory, but also the planning and redesigning of laboratory space to house cadaver parts as well as writing a lab manual for the course to incorporate these experiences. (<https://news.gatech.edu/news/2021/05/20/hands-anatomy-one-foot-medical-school-one-foot-undergrad>). This effort has had a profound impact on our pre-med students!

Over the last decade, I have conducted multiple observations of Adam's teaching in *Human Anatomy*, *Human Pathology*, and *Scientific Foundations of Health*. He is an **exceptional** instructor! Teaching a class of 200+ students comes with unique challenges for engagement and student learning. To compound the matter, in *Human Anatomy*, students must learn a tremendous amount of medical terminology, anatomical structures and gain an understanding of the function of body systems in a short amount of time. Due to the nature of the course content, it requires intense memorization which is crucial for students' success as they begin to develop clinical skills.

To increase student learning, Adam has restructured the anatomy curriculum to use an integrated systems-based approach. This allows students to better understand the interconnections of organ systems. Additionally, he uses multiple pedagogical approaches which have been shown to increase effectiveness in anatomy instruction. Students learn by mapping structures as he walks them through the process. He uses acronyms and mnemonics (After all, Never Let My car Blow an Engine can be quite useful when trying to recall the white blood cell types in order of relative concentrations in the blood--Neutrophils, Lymphocytes, Monocytes, Basophils, Eosinophils). Additionally, he teaches his students the "root" of medical terms to assist in their understanding. His efforts earn him consistently high course instructor ratings from students.

Throughout his career as both educator and advisor in the physiology minor, Adam has sought input from his students and tried to better meet their needs for preparation for medical school. Adam designed and implemented BIOSC 4440 *Human Pathology*, in 2018. It is now a popular undergraduate elective and regularly fills to max capacity. One student stated it was, "Hands down the most useful pre-med course at GT. Loved every minute of it."

Outside of class, Adam holds optional case studies sessions covering the chest, heart, and abdomen. He demonstrates a complete physical exam on each region as he walks students through a clinical case from diagnosis to treatment. He has tutored students who struggled with the physiology portion of the MCAT. As a physiology advisor, Adam has counseled countless students on career paths in healthcare. He also regularly reviews the current curriculum at medical schools to ensure these programs are a good fit for our students.

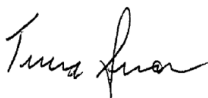
Adam shows great enthusiasm for all the classes he leads, and his passion gets the students excited! He appreciates their desire to be challenged and has a very special talent for motivating students to learn. One student commented, “Dr. Decker is an awesome professor for human anatomy! He always adds clinical examples and fun tidbits to accompany the lectures which keeps me focused and interested.” Another wrote, “I just finished my first semester in a graduate DPT program. Dr. Decker's human anatomy course saved me. I found myself teaching others in my class.” Based on these comments, it should be no surprise that in 2020, Adam was the recipient of the Class of 1934 Student Recognition of Excellence in Teaching Award. That same year, Adam was awarded the Georgia Tech Professor of Excellence Award and used the cash prize to fund activities in the human anatomy lab.

Whether it is in a large class of 250 students or a smaller class of 50, Adam has a powerful presence in the classroom and his vast array of knowledge is obvious. He keeps his students engaged with his unique presentation style which seamlessly combines course information with personal experience, storytelling, and humor. As one student stated, “Dr. Decker is as humorous as he is kind, and he's as kind as he is smart. And he is very smart”

On a more personal note, Dr. Decker is not only committed to student learning, but he is also a lifelong learner dedicated to self-improvement. He is currently finishing his doctoral program in Medical and Health Professions Education at Eastern Virginia Medical School. His efforts will allow him to further expand his teaching modalities and bring an added research component to learners who are pursuing health professions.

In summary, Adam Decker is a dedicated, enthusiastic educator who creates an environment that motivates his students to be thoughtful, intentional contributors to learning. He goes above and beyond to constantly reassess, refine, and design innovative curriculum to improve undergraduate education at Georgia Tech. Adam is respected, admired, and appreciated by our undergraduate population. For these reasons, he is most deserving of your consideration for this award. His service to the institute and our undergraduates is invaluable.

Sincerely,



Teresa K. Snow, Ph.D.
Senior Academic Professional & Undergraduate Coordinator
School of Biological Sciences
555 14th Street NW
Atlanta, Ga 30332-0356
404-894-0636

To the selectors of the CTL Undergrad Educator Award,

My name is Jordan Davis, and I am a former student and teaching assistant to Dr. Decker who wishes to see him be acknowledged for the incredible work he does and the character he exudes. Dr. Decker is a one-of-a-kind and unforgettable instructor, mentor, friend, and piece of the Georgia Tech community who has earned his candidacy for this award through his dedication to the prehealth students of Georgia Tech. The unbelievable growth of his anatomy class sizes, the permanent addition to the healthcare curriculum in his pathology course, and his near single-handed push to establish and continually build upon the human materials collection used in his lab are all accomplishments appreciable by a stranger, but it is in his interactions and investments in his students that Dr. Decker really shines.

I transferred to Tech from a smaller university and experienced a great culture and difficulty shift that caused my first semester to be the rockiest of my undergrad. Decker's anatomy course was not only my favorite course of that first semester it was also the experience that naturalized my new surroundings and made me excited to continue at the advanced pace and difficulty our university is known for. He is a gifted and enrapturing lecturer who incorporates anecdotes from his storied career to provide levity and relatability to his robust lessons. The passion he has felt for anatomy and human health throughout his life is evident in every second of his teaching, and that excitement is infectious. His courses are challenging but organized so that those who wish to master the content will excel. He provides his teaching materials after each lecture and these are filled with mnemonics, diagrams, and outside links to assist in the memorization of the many structures he implores us to learn. He offers a bevy of outside resources and events to students aside from labs and lectures, some of which serve to imbue pre-health students with clinical skills they would otherwise go without. Dr. Decker hosts mass study and review sessions to review for exams on weekends and school holidays. He leads unique pathology investigations where he teaches the symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of widespread and obscure pathologies using volunteers for demonstration. Most critically he hosts regular openings of wet anatomy lab throughout the semester to let curious students examine the preserved human specimens he has procured for them. Dr. Decker has spent the last few years fighting tooth and nail to establish and grow the school's collection of dissection materials and takes delight in allowing his students and TAs to learn from them. I can't stress the excitement and investment these labs foster in the pre-health community, there's not a student I know who hasn't sought out the experience of learning through the collection Dr. Decker has curated. He gives his time and attention to students in ways I have never seen a professor do before or since, and is always happy to engage in conversation regarding the materials of the course and topics beyond them.

Dr. Decker is a towering advocate for premed students at Georgia Tech, a smaller community of students that often felt bereft of leaders. All are welcome and will love his dedicated teaching of the body, but those with a passion for healthcare will find a friend and mentor who will guide and support them for years to come. Decker takes immense pride and enjoyment in seeing his students succeed and in seeing the methods by which they do so. I first came to know him personally when I showed him the diagrams I had drawn to help with memorization in his course, and the warm and genuine compliments

he gave me encouraged me to double down on my hobby and continue to apply it to the healthcare field. He granted me the honor of my time at Tech by trusting me to TA for the course I loved so much, a development that bolstered my confidence and helped to forever improve my ability to speak to and lead others. During my time working under him and to this day, he has been a giving and caring mentor. He allowed me and his other assistants access to the materials of his lab and gave us the precious responsibility of teaching from them. He voiced and showed his appreciation constantly and made sure that those who trusted him for advice and assistance with our preprofessional development got it. He pays attention to our interests and plans and sends updates, opportunities, and kind words without prompting just to check in and further help us reach our goals. He has provided job recommendations and thoughtful gifts throughout the years that I've known him, and it warms my heart to know I'm not alone in receiving his support. He has written letters of recommendation for me and so many other burgeoning professionals, providing crucial advocacy for us to become physicians, PAs, and other worthwhile professionals. I do not feel I would be heading to medical school without having known and rose to the expectations of Dr. Decker, his influence was that critical to me. He offers relevant challenges and gives context to students' goals. He takes the dreams of Georgia Tech students upon himself and provides his advice, comradery, and support far beyond what is expected, and I will always be grateful for that. There is no professor more worthy of this award than Adam Decker. I thank him earnestly for the opportunity to give back when he has given so much, by recommending him for it.

Sincerely,

Jordan Davis

davisjordan214@gmail.com

Dear CTL Undergraduate Educator Award Committee,

My name is Koyal Ansingkar, and I am currently a masters student in medical physiology at Case Western Reserve University. I will be attending medical school starting this summer. I was Dr. Adam Decker's student and his teaching assistant on several occasions throughout my time at Georgia Tech from 2016 to 2021. I am writing to enthusiastically support his nomination for the CTL Undergrad Educator Award. Dr. Decker is an excellent educator and a remarkably positive influence on the School of Biological Sciences and Georgia Tech as a whole. As such, I have no reservations about how deserving he is of this award.

Dr. Decker was my instructor for multiple courses I took, ranging from APPH 1040 (the health class available to students of all levels and disciplines, with class sizes in the hundreds) to BIOS 4440 (Human Pathology, a more intimate class with a handful of advanced pre-med students). These experiences made clear his versatility and range in the classroom. Dr. Decker was equally comfortable introducing biological concepts for the first time to first year business majors as he was challenging and expanding the horizons of pathology students who had been interested in medicine for years. Dr. Decker expects excellence from his students, and the precision and obvious passion with which he broaches course topics ensures that students in his classes reliably achieve this standard. There is no other professor who is able to engage so many students simultaneously.

As his teaching assistant for Anatomy Lab and Human Pathology, I was able to see his approach from the other perspective, as well. Even in the face of challenges, Dr. Decker's priorities remained steadfast. Even for students who did not share his love for Anatomy, he refused to let them leave without at least understanding it. His methods for teaching students left them with a lasting understanding of each topic, a feat that is quite difficult to achieve in this age.

Dr. Decker shines outside of the classroom, as well. Since my graduation, he has remained a supporter, mentor, and advisor for me, and I know he has done this for other students as well. He has even connected me with current students to help share my path to medical school and offer them advice, proving that he would go above and beyond for any student. Dr. Decker was an inspiration for me to first get involved with teaching and to keep it as a part of my professional life ever since then. He also played a major role in keeping my love for anatomy and physiology alive when I began to doubt my future in medicine during my undergraduate studies. When reminiscing with other Georgia Tech graduates about our professors and faculty that made an impression on us, Dr. Adam Decker's name is brought up more often than not, whether it was because of four years' worth of interactions or just because of one semester of health class. For these reasons and more, he is absolutely deserving of the CTL Undergrad Educator Award.

Sincerely,
Koyal Ansingkar

Dear Members of the CTL Undergraduate Educator Award Selection Committee,

It is my honor and pleasure to recommend Dr. Decker for the 2023 CTL Undergraduate Educator Award at Georgia Tech. Dr. Decker is an exceptional and encouraging professor, and he always teaches class with the most enthusiasm and passion. He is kind, caring, humorous, relatable, and extremely intelligent. I know I speak for all students when I say he has definitely made a significant and long-lasting impact on all students and our community. He is an inspiration to us all, especially to students who want to pursue a career in health or medicine such as myself.

I first met Dr. Decker in Applied Physiology on the first day of my summer semester as a senior. I still remember his unmatched energy and ability to keep all of his students fully engaged throughout the three hour class. After taking this class with him, I was eager to sign up to take another class with him in my fall semester. I decided to take Anatomy, and it is still my favorite class I have taken at Georgia Tech to this day. Although the topic of Anatomy can be overwhelming at times due to the plethora of information, Dr. Decker always came up with clever ways to remember all of the different body parts and systems. He also created a comfortable environment in his classroom for any questions and discussion, which I really appreciated. Dr. Decker always teaches with patience, great care, and empathy, and he truly understands what students need from him. Being a doctor, Dr. Decker always brought his unique perspective in health and medicine to every class, and he related his lectures to the most interesting case studies.

Dr. Decker is so kind and really cares about his students' success inside and outside of the classroom. For instance, one day after class, I told him about how I was struggling with studying for the MCAT, one of my toughest obstacles I have faced whilst wanting to pursue a career in medicine. Dr. Decker immediately offered to meet one-on-one before classes in order to help me with several topics I did not completely understand. I still remember his analogy of relating a waterfall, my favorite landform, to the function of the distal convoluted tube in the kidney nephron. I really appreciated these meetings and all of his advice, tips, and lessons, and they will all stick with me throughout medical school. Overall, he made the process of studying much easier and allowed me to broaden my perspective in medicine, helping me to find simple connections of different health topics to my own life. Dr. Decker helped me reignite my passion for studying biology and medicine, and he helped me remember why I wanted to pursue a career in medicine in the first place.

Dr. Decker truly is an inspiration to all students, and he has made a big impact on my journey in college. I am very grateful for everything he has taught me, and he embodies everything it means to be a spectacular professor. Again, Dr. Decker is very deserving of the 2023 CTL Undergraduate Educator Award, and it is a privilege to write this letter about him.

Sincerely,

Nicole Kang
School of Biological Sciences
Georgia Institute of Technology 2023