

**Speech by Catrin Böcher, Chair of the Leiden University Student Platform (LUS)  
Opening of the Academic Year, 6 September 2021**

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen here today, nominees, and online viewers,

On behalf of the Leiden University Student Platform (LUS), as the Chair, I would like to present the Leiden Teaching Prize. There are seven other students in the LUS, one from each faculty, who unfortunately can't be here today. However, I would like to thank them most sincerely for their dedication and hard work over the past year.

The Leiden Teaching Prize is an award for the best lecturer at Leiden University. We looked for unique, innovative and smart methods that were used by lecturers in designing their teaching. The exceptional circumstances in education over the past year meant that our focus was not only on transfer of knowledge but especially on the well-being of all participants.

We asked all Leiden University students to nominate lecturers who are excellent teachers, have developed innovative teaching methods and are an inspiration for their students. We then attended the classes of all the nominated lecturers and were delighted to discover that the University has such an abundance of outstanding teachers. We saw a wide range of ideas in how lecturers have designed their online and offline teaching and made smart use of the advantages of both. Even though it was a difficult year because we all had to work from home so much and had little or no opportunity to meet in person, we were very enthusiastic to see in the classes we attended that lecturers were still able to create a welcoming, interactive and caring environment for their students.

In the following video, I would like to introduce to you the three nominees who particularly stood out among all the nominations.

*Video*

The three lecturers who have been nominated have all fulfilled their teaching role in their own inventive way in the exceptionally challenging situation presented by the past year.

I would like to briefly speak about each of the top three candidates before I announce the winner of this year's Leiden Teaching Prize.

Ayo Adedokun was nominated by his students for his enthusiasm and engagement. He made sure every student felt heard during class and worked hard to create an interactive learning environment. By offering his students to go on walks with him he made contact and interaction easy, gave students the chance to enjoy the benefits of in-person communication and also aimed at being in touch with his students to know how they were doing and what struggles they might be encountering.

David Fontijn was also highly praised for the attention he gave his students and his commitment to creating a stimulating learning environment. By producing

short 'knowledge videos', he found a good balance between the advantages of a digital learning environment, and by making intensive use of the contact hours, he was able to minimise the disadvantages of remote learning. His use of examples helped the students to clearly understand the content and made the material more accessible. Particular emphasis was placed on facilitating what his students described as 'lively discussions' and as far as possible he even took account of his students' different time zones.

Finally, Els de Busser succeeded in keeping her students engaged and interested, with input based on current events and many practical examples. Students particularly praised her calm approach to teaching and how she gives everyone the courage to participate in discussions, thus creating a safe and interactive learning environment. Her clear and motivating teaching manner made her students incredibly enthusiastic about the subject.

These lecturers all designed their teaching over the past year in their own way. Their approaches are very different, but what they have in common is that they helped students to still derive a great deal of pleasure from their studies, despite the digital barrier and unprecedented challenges. Each of these three lecturers is an excellent example.

Yet one lecturer in particular stood out for us. With outstanding enthusiasm, this lecturer was able to motivate his students and create a learning environment where every student felt at home. He gave exceptional attention to the well-being of every student and worked tremendously hard to sustain this. His classes were not just about knowledge transfer but were also motivating, interactive and a welcoming environment. It is therefore an honour and true pleasure for me to announce the winner of the Leiden Teaching Prize: