Professor receives psychology award
McNeil recognized by national association for career of distinguished research

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Psychology professor Nicole McNeil has been nationally recognized in her field after earning the American Psychological Association's (APA) 2013 Boyd McCandless Award for distinguished contribution to psychology.

McNeil said she was surprised to be selected by the APA's Division 7 for the prestigious award.

"I was shocked," she said. "The previous winners of the award are all well known, highly influential psychologists. It is a great honor to receive the award and be listed among them."

The APA Division 7 is the association's subgroup focused on psychologists specialized in human development. The group's award "recognizes an early career scientist ... who has made a distinguished theoretical contribution to developmental psychology, has conducted programmatic research of distinction, or has made a distinguished contribution to the dissemination of developmental science," according to the APA website.

McNeil attributed her success in the field to her past teachers and peers.

"It's an award based on my entire body of research to date, so everyone I've learned from and worked with has helped me win the award — all of my mentors, collaborator and students," she said.

McNeil said her former advisor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison was most influential to her academic and professional development.

"My most important teacher, mentor and collaborator is [psychology professor] Martha Albail. She is the first person who got me interested in cognitive developmental research when I was an undergraduate and she was my advisor in graduate school."

While McNeil is being recognized for her research, she is deeply involved in other aspects of academia at Notre Dame, teaching cognitive development, developmental psychology and learning and instruction for the Alliance for Catholic Education.

McNeil said her work as director of the University's Cognition Learning and Development Laboratory has allowed her to bring together her interests in psychology, education and research.

"One of our goals is to identify the best ways for parents and teachers to structure children's environments to help them learn important math concepts," she said.