The URSCO is pleased to recognize Dr. Nadja Cech as the 2017 Thomas Undergraduate Research Mentor Award recipient. Dr. Cech joined faculty at UNCG as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry in 2001. Since then, she has mentored 50 undergraduate and 39 graduate students. The fruits of their labor are evident fantastic. Over the last 10 years, Dr. Cech has coauthored 15 research publications with 21 undergraduates. Many of these publications are in first class journals such as *Analytical Chemistry*, *Journal of Natural Products*, and *the Journal of the American Society for Mass Spectrometry*. Similarly, 19 of her undergraduate mentee have given presentations at national or regional conferences, including National meetings of the American Chemical Society, the American Society for Mass Spectrometry, and the American Society of Pharmacognosy. Several of her students have received presentation awards at the Annual Carolyn and Norwood Thomas Undergraduate Research and Creativity Expo, including Scott Jarmusch, Alan Jarmusch, Clint Alfaro, Ashleigh Musso, Daniel Foil, Nadjali Chung, Adama Secka, and Jennifer Flynn. Furthermore, half of her mentees have gone on to graduate or professional school, where 19 have pursued degrees in the sciences and 6 in the practice of medicine.

After joining the UNCG faculty, Dr. Cech was eager to apply her theoretical studies of mass spectrometry to her long-dormant interest in medicinal plants. She started by asking the question, “How can mass spectrometry be used to study the synergistic interactions responsible for the biological activity of botanical medicines?” This question has been the topic of 10 consecutive years of external funding from agencies including the National Institutes of Health (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine). In addition, Dr. Cech has taught courses that include Instrumental Analysis, General Chemistry, Quantitative Analysis, Forensic Chemistry, Environmental Chemistry, Graduate Analytical Chemistry, Graduate Mass Spectrometry, and Graduate Proposal Writing. She currently supervises 14 undergraduates, graduate students, and post-doctoral research associates who work in the Cech Research Group. Dr. Cech has been recognized for both her teaching (2008 UNCG College Teaching Award) and her research (2011 UNCG Junior Research Excellence Award) and has published 34 peer-reviewed papers.

One student wrote of Dr. Cech, “There are few professors who are more passionate about the importance of mentoring undergraduate scholarship than Dr. Cech...” The high praises for Dr. Cech resound around the scholarly community and her impact on undergraduate and graduate researcher’s lives is appreciated and inspirational. Her mentorship style emphasizes affirmation and recognition of effort and accomplishment. She wants her mentees to be able to produce high-quality research, while still being able to effectively communicate their study. To this end, Dr. Cech encourages her students to present and publish their work, whether it be at national conferences or in high-quality journals. Dr. Cech encourages the graduate students and post-doctoral scholars in her research group to work directly with the undergraduate team members, resulting in an effective tiered mentoring program. These interactions help the students develop their own teaching and mentorship skills. Dr. Cech
believes that the success of her research students is, at least in part, a consequence of weekly group meetings. During which, all students discuss their research findings and work together to collectively overcome the challenges that they are facing. A former student researcher commended Dr. Cech’s weekly meetings as “…highly unusual for a university faculty member…” They were impressed at the balance of providing students with access to cutting-edge analytical instruments along with meeting in groups to discuss results in union.

The Undergraduate Research, Scholarship and Creativity Office at UNCG established this award to recognize faculty members who engage students in projects that contribute to the expansion of knowledge and understanding in their discipline, and demonstrating excellence and innovation in doing so. Dr. Nadja Cech has managed to do this in an exemplary fashion, and we are honored to present her with the 2017 Thomas Undergraduate Research Mentor Award.