

Nominee: Dr. May R. Berenbaum

Position: Professor and Department Head, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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What she's into: She is all about the interplay between insects and their host plants. Over the past decades she has teased apart various chemical underpinnings of these relationships, explored co-evolution and species evolution through webworms and parsnips, investigated the current and potential impacts of climate change on insects, studied toxicity in honey bees, and used ecological concepts to create sustainable agricultural practices. Her work encompasses a wide variety of biological disciplines including evolution, ecology, genetics, molecular biology, toxicology, sustainable development, biochemistry, natural history, and physiology.

Her general interests: Besides maintaining her own lab's research and heading the entomology department, she is a strong advocate and active member in science literacy. She teaches a course at the University of Illinois directly aimed at educating non-science individuals about entomology to increase general understanding and decrease common aversion. She has authored numerous books about insects for the general public, and is a pillar for STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) women through constant advocacy, mentorship and over-arching support. She is the lead organizer and spearhead for the annual public Insect Fear Film Festival, which aims to raise awareness and debunk Hollywood myths about insects, always accompanied by educational programs and direct public-arthropod interactions, as well as featuring benevolent tie-ins such as blood-drives. She maintains an active public image on social media through twitter ([@MayBerenbaum](https://twitter.com/MayBerenbaum)), as well as via various science press outlets.

Why she be the bomb diggity: On top of winning a variety of national awards for the advancement of environmental science, just eight months ago, she stood beside Present Obama as he awarded her with a National Medal of Science. When awarding Dr. Berenbaum with a distinguished teaching award, the Entomological Society of America described May as 'a person of remarkable scientific accomplishment, boundless energy, brilliant creativity, and passionate dedication to public understanding of science'. Even Hollywood has recently recognized her boss nature by naming a character in The X-Files, Dr. Bambi Merenbaum, a famous entomologist, after her. I think Dr. Berenbaum would make an awesome grad hosted speaker as her work integrating chemical ecology into sustainability practices, conservation planning and overlying science mandates is directly applicable to a wide variety of current biological challenges and foci. On a broader scale she could address modern day science communication, literacy, and advocacy, as well as speak about the importance of diversity in science.