

**Agendum
Oakland University
Board of Trustees Formal Session
February 13, 2026**

**APPOINTMENT OF JENNIFER VONK TO THE RANK
OF DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR
A Recommendation**

1. **Division and Department:** Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost.
2. **Introduction:** In 1988, the Board of Trustees (Board) created the faculty rank of Distinguished Professor. Upon recommendation of the President and Provost, the Board may appoint individuals to the rank of Distinguished Professor for the duration of the individual's active service at Oakland University. Appointments to distinguished professorships are based on the candidate's efforts and accomplishments in the areas of teaching, intellectual contributions and service, giving consideration to the programmatic and institutional setting of the candidate's work at Oakland and the nature of the candidate's assignments and responsibilities, the quality of the candidate's accomplishments and the relation of all the foregoing factors to the objectives of the area or departments, the goals of the college or school, and the mission and long-range vision of the University.
3. **Previous Board Action:** The Board has periodically appointed individuals to the rank of Distinguished Professor at Formal Sessions of the Board.
4. **Budget Implications:** A one-time salary stipend of \$2,500 plus an annual supplies and services allocation of \$1,500, up to five years, for the Distinguished Professor will be paid from the Provost's Discretionary Fund.
5. **Educational Implications:** Recognition of a distinguished faculty member's long-standing dedication to the mission of the institution reinforces a culture that is devoted to excellence in teaching, research, creative endeavor, and service.
6. **Personnel Implications:** None.
7. **University Reviews/Approvals:** A selection committee of her peers recommended Jennifer Vonk of the College of Arts and Sciences for approval to Dr. Amy Thompson, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, for the appointment of Distinguished Professor.

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8. **Recommendation:** RESOLVED, that the Board of Trustees approves the appointment of Jennifer Vonk, Professor of Psychology, to the rank of Distinguished Professor, effective August 15, 2026.

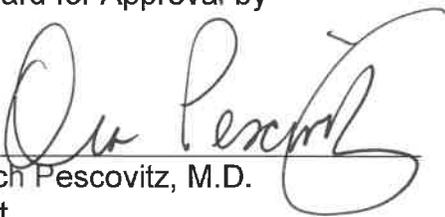
9. **Attachment:** Biography of Jennifer Vonk.

Submitted to the President
on January 27, 2026 by



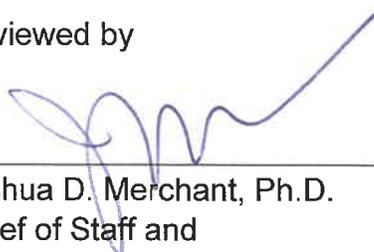
Amy Thompson, Ph.D., FESG, CHES
Executive Vice President for
Academic Affairs and Provost

Recommendation on 1/27, 2026
to the Board for Approval by



Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D.
President

Reviewed by



Joshua D. Merchant, Ph.D.
Chief of Staff and
Secretary to the Board of Trustees

Biography

Jennifer Vonk, Ph.D.

Oakland University
Professor of Psychology
College of Arts and Sciences
211 Pryale Hall; (248) 370-2318

Prof. Vonk is an internationally known comparative-cognitive psychologist. Her program of research over nearly three decades investigates the mechanisms underlying cognition and behavior in diverse species, including human children and adults, with the goal of better understanding the evolutionary factors that give rise to cognitive capacities. She also has a long-standing interest in using cognitive tests to improve the welfare of captive nonhuman animals. Prof. Vonk has established successful collaborative research relationships with many animal facilities, including the Detroit Zoo, the Toledo Zoo, and Creature Conservancy in Ann Arbor, for herself and her undergraduate and graduate students. Prof. Vonk has authored over 100 empirical and theoretical articles in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes (in addition to presenting dozens of talks and posters at national and international conferences).

A particularly notable quality of Prof. Vonk is her broad theoretical background and expertise across several areas of psychology and several fields within the social and life sciences; including biology, ethology, and sociobiology. Prof. Vonk has published extensively in the premier journals in comparative-cognitive psychology. Her work has been cited nearly 7,000 times, placing her among the most frequently cited psychologists in the world. In addition, Prof. Vonk has contributed several dozen chapters to scholarly volumes. She has served as editor or co-editor of several scholarly volumes and as co-editor of the Springer Encyclopedia of Animal Cognition and Behavior. Prof. Vonk has delivered over 100 conference presentations at annual meetings of a variety of professional organizations. Her reputation for research excellence has led to her appointment as an editor of several of the most prestigious journals in psychology, including Co-Editor-in-Chief for Animal Behavior and Cognition and Section Editor for PeerJ. In addition, Prof. Vonk serves on the editorial boards of several leading journals in comparative, cognitive, and evolutionary psychology. As further testament to her status and reputation in the field, Prof. Vonk was elected a Fellow of the Society for Behavioral Neuroscience and Comparative Psychology/Division 6 of the American Psychological Association.

Dr. Vonk's influence extends powerfully into teaching and mentorship. Several of her students now hold tenured faculty positions at various institutions. She has served on more than 25 additional thesis committees across departments and institutions. For the past 12 years, Dr. Vonk has been the only faculty member to review and provide detailed feedback on all psychology graduate students' master's thesis proposals.

Her sustained excellence in scholarship, mentorship, service, and leadership clearly distinguishes her as one of Oakland University's most accomplished faculty members. Oakland University honors Professor Vonk with the title of Distinguished Professor.