**Mansfield University student wins**

**17th annual Syed R. Ali-Zaidi Award**

***Sarah Polinski of Sayre receives medallion, $1,000***

***for outstanding academic achievement***

**Harrisburg** – Mansfield University of Pennsylvania graduate Sarah Y. Polinski is the 2017 winner of the Syed R. Ali-Zaidi Award for Academic Excellence from Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education.

Polinski of Sayre, who majored in both music education and vocal performance, received a commemorative medallion and a $1,000 cash prize for winning the award. The Board of Governors recognized her accomplishments at its meeting today. She graduated *summa cum laude* in December with a 4.0 grade-point average.

The Ali-Zaidi award is presented annually to a graduating senior at one of the 14 State System universities. It recognizes outstanding academic achievement and participation in extra- and co-curricular activities. This is the 17th year for the award, which was established in 2001 by Syed R. Ali-Zaidi, a founding member of the State System’s Board of Governors.

The university presidents recommend candidates for the award at the conclusion of a campus application and selection process. Selection criteria comprise academic scholarship, including prizes, honors and membership in honorary societies; participation in extra/co-curricular activities; and a two-page essay by the nominee addressing how the university has prepared him or her for the next career step.

“The Ali-Zaidi award gives us the opportunity each year to recognize students who excel not only in the classroom, but also in all areas of campus life, often giving back to their communities in very meaningful ways. Sarah is an outstanding example of that, and a real role model for others,” said Board of Governors Chairwoman Cynthia D. Shapira.

Polinski earned various honors while attending Mansfield University, including both the Fitz Dixon Memorial Scholarship, which is awarded to students who demonstrate both “academic excellence and voluntary service within the community, at home and at his or her State System university,” and the Jack Wilson Memorial Scholarship for Musical Theatre. She also received a Delta Kappa Gamma Education Grant, which is awarded by the DKG International Society for Key Women Educators to students who “excel academically, are involved in community and school activities, and who have a sincere commitment to the field of education.”

Polinski served as manager of the Mansfield University Phonathon for two years, raising more than $43,000 for the university herself and training 28 other student callers each semester. She also has worked as a fundraiser for the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

She was director of the Hamilton-Gibson Young Women’s Choir, a youth community choir in Wellsboro, and gave private music lessons. She also was a facilitator for the HOBY Youth Leadership Conference, treasurer of the Mansfield Jazz Organization and fundraising chair of the American Choral Directors Association.

Polinski was a student teacher in the Wyalusing School District and graduated as valedictorian from Sayre Area High School in 2012.

Finalists for this year’s award were: Boenell Kline of Milton, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania; Claudia Pehowic of Northumberland, California University of Pennsylvania; Jasmine Richardson of Philadelphia, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania; Kelly Dungan of Warren, Ohio, Clarion University of Pennsylvania; Danielle Ard of Mifflinburg, East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania; Breanna Purnell of Palmyra, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania; Kara McClain of Grove City, Indiana University of Pennsylvania; Margariete Malenda of Fleetwood, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania; Heather Porter of West Sunbury, Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania; Sylvia Hitz of Lebanon, Millersville University of Pennsylvania; Michelle Bradley of Dover, Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania; Timothy Samec of Drums, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania; and Kellen Kane of Selinsgrove, West Chester University of Pennsylvania.

*Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education is the largest provider of higher education in the Commonwealth, enrolling more than 100,000 degree-seeking students and thousands more in certificate and other career-development programs. Collectively, the 14 universities that comprise the State System offer more than 2,300 degree and certificate programs in more than 530 academic areas. Nearly 520,000 State System university alumni live in Pennsylvania.*

*The State System universities are Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania. The universities also operate branch campuses in Oil City (Clarion), Freeport and Punxsutawney (IUP), and Clearfield (Lock Haven), and offer classes and programs at several regional centers, including the Dixon University Center in Harrisburg and in Center City in Philadelphia.*