SAS Teaching Awards

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Dr. Rebecca W. Bushnell, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, and Dr. Dennis DeTurck, dean of the College, announced the following recipients of the School’s 2009 teaching awards, to be presented on Thursday, April 30 at an awards reception that is open to the University community. The reception will take place from 4 to 6 p.m. in the Upper Egyptian Gallery of the Penn Museum.

Ira H. Abrams Memorial Award for Distinguished Teaching

This year’s recipients of SAS’s highest teaching honor are Dr. Christine Poggi, professor of history of art, and Dr. Philip Rea, professor of biology. Created in 1983, the Ira H. Abrams Award recognizes teaching that is intellectually challenging and exceptionally coherent and honors faculty who embody high standards of integrity and fairness, have a strong commitment to learning, and are open to new ideas.

Dr. Poggi is hailed as a “superb teacher who is a model of clarity, organization, generosity, and stimulation.” While best known for her large undergraduate lecture courses on modern art, she is also widely praised as an undergraduate research advisor and a mentor of graduate students. “Chris's teaching,” observes a colleague, “makes exceptionally clear why art matters.”

Dr. Rea is being recognized for his exceptional classroom teaching—in introductory and advanced courses in both biology and in the Vagelos Life Sciences and Management Program that is a team effort with Wharton—and his mentorship of undergraduate and graduate students. One student comments of Dr. Rea that “I cannot think of any professor at Penn who more convinced his students that they were not just students, but scientists.”
Dean’s Award for Innovation in Teaching

This award, which recognizes exceptional creativity and innovation in instruction, goes to Dr. Amishi Jha, assistant professor of psychology, for her upper-level undergraduate course cognitive neuroscience of meditation. A School of Medicine colleague says of the class, which combines training in meditation with rigorous scientific study of attention and working memory, “It has transformed my concept of what is possible in a classroom and within a university.”

Dean’s Award for Mentorship of Undergraduate Research

This award recognizes faculty members who have excelled in nurturing students’ desires and abilities to conduct meaningful research. This year SAS honors the English department’s Peter Stallybrass, the Walter H. and Leonore C. Annenberg Professor in the Humanities. Having advised students on some 30 independent study projects, Professor Stallybrass earns praise for, as one colleague writes, his “ability to inspire his students to do research that truly does engage with the state of work in the field, and …to manage the delicate balance between guiding them down profitable avenues and freeing them to make the project completely theirs.”

Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Award for Distinguished Teaching by an Assistant Professor

This award recognizes a member of the junior faculty who demonstrates unusual promise as an educator. This year’s recipient is Dr. Melissa Sanchez, assistant professor of English. Of her classes ranging from the undergraduate honors thesis seminar to Milton to feminist theory, a colleague notes that Dr. Sanchez’s “students are deeply impressed by her passion for her subject, but they are more impressed by what they accomplished in her courses.”

Dean’s Award for Distinguished Teaching by Affiliated Faculty

This award recognizes the contributions to undergraduate education made by the School’s non-standing faculty. This year’s recipient is Dr. Michael Kaplan, the laboratory coordinator and instructor in the Biological Basis of Behavior (BBB) program. Through his classroom teaching, laboratory instruction, and development of the Neurolab, which gives BBB students the opportunity to study neuronal function first-hand, Dr. Kaplan has, as a colleague reports, “changed how people think about the world around them and their perception of it.”

LPS Distinguished Teaching Award

This award honors outstanding teaching and advising in the College of Liberal and Professional Studies (LPS). This year two non-standing faculty are being honored. Stanley Laskowski teaches environmental management
and policy courses in earth and environmental science and in particular through the LPS-based master of environmental studies program. Students hail not only his classroom teaching and advising but also his role in developing internship and capstone opportunities that give students hands-on experience. Dr. Barbara Riebling lectures in English, with an emphasis on the English Renaissance. A colleague writes, “Many students who declare the major or minor, both LPS students and traditional undergraduates, cite her courses as the ‘conversion’ courses, which not only make them feel comfortable with the study of English literature but feel as if they have received a basic foundation in that study.”

Dean’s Award for Distinguished Teaching by Graduate Students
This award recognizes graduate students for teaching that is intellectually rigorous and has a considerable impact on undergraduate students. This year’s awardees are:

David Bateman, Political Science
Barbara Elias, Political Science
Laurel Mackenzie, Linguistics
Ryan Muldoon, Philosophy
Jonathan Pogach, Economics
Jared Richman, English
David Russo, Economics
Judith Sierra-Rivera, Romance Languages
David Shea Vela-Vick, Mathematics
Brandon Woods, English

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