Board of Governors’ Award for Excellence in Teaching

Established by the Board of Governors in April 1994 to underscore the importance of teaching and to reward good teaching across the university system, the awards are given annually to a tenured faculty member from each UNC campus. Carolina’s winner, Dino Cervigni, will be recognized during the May 8 Commencement ceremony.

BARRY R. LENTZ  Professor of biochemistry and biophysics

Faculty member  1975
Field of expertise  Membrane and molecular biophysics
Little-known fact  “At 67, I am the oldest student in Carrboro’s United Tae Kwon Do dojang, but it’s great fun to be a student, and the kids are not only supportive but also love to teach Mr. Barry!”
Teaching philosophy  “What should one do to create a top educational program? First, put the students above all else. That has been my mantra in building the biophysics graduate program and undergraduate summer course in biophysics. Second, make learning a group activity; create a community in which all participants (faculty and students) enjoy learning from each other. Third, care about people. Finally, rejoice in your students’ growth and take pride in their success.”
Excerpts from award citation  “Barry’s dedication to the students in the biophysics program is legendary. Once you’re a member of that program, you’re imprinted into Barry’s daily thoughts, and he gives you all the time imaginable (and more) to making sure your classes go well, your rotations are fruitful and your thesis research is successful. I can think of no mentor at Carolina more dedicated to his flock than Barry.”  

J. Carlyle Sitterson Freshman Teaching Award

ALLEN GLAZNER  Chair, and Kenan Professor of Geological Sciences

Faculty member  1981
Field of expertise  Formation of granite and the Earth’s crust, crystal growth in magmas, plate tectonics and the space-time patterns of magmatism in western North America
Little-known fact  “In an alternate universe I am a fashion photographer.”
Teaching philosophy  “My favorite teaching moments come when a student realizes that many of the ‘things we know’ are wrong, that textbooks don’t hold the answers — the Earth does — and that they can make new discoveries for themselves.”
Excerpts from award citation  One student wrote that Glazner’s “first-year seminar class is more than just a class — it is an experience for his students.” One student wrote, “Taking this class was the best decision I made last year. And I would recommend it to everyone.” A letter of nomination from a colleague stated, “Allen is an excellent example of an outstanding researcher who loves to teach. His first-year seminars are becoming legendary, and the students’ accomplishments last year are a result of both his research and teaching skills.”

This award was created in 1998 by the family of the late J. Carlyle Sitterson to recognize excellence in freshman teaching by a tenured or tenure-track faculty member in the College of Arts and Sciences.
Tanner Awards for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching

ROBERT C. ALLEN  
James Logan Godfrey Distinguished Professor of American Studies  
- Faculty member 1979  
- Field of expertise Cultural history, popular entertainment, digital history  
- Little-known fact  “I was a judge for the international ‘Reigning Queen of Burlesque’ competition in Las Vegas in 2009.”

Teaching philosophy  “I am a vocal proponent and keen practitioner of ‘project-based learning.” Whenever possible I structure my undergraduate courses around integrated, inter-disciplinary discovery experiences that leverage individual student interests and curiosities. My classes are places where students share and synthesize learning that might take place in Wilson Library, grandmother’s front porch or a Buddhist monastery in Thailand. I want students to see opportunities for learning all around them, and to see their undergraduate experience at UNC as a catalyst for life-long learning.”

- Excerpts from award citation  Allen’s pedagogy encourages students to see opportunities for learning all around them, and to see their undergraduate experience at UNC as preparation for life-long learning. One student observed that Allen’s comparative Australian history course was so engaging that some students wanted to continue the discussion after class — impressive given that the class meeting lasted three hours and ended at 9 p.m. “Professor Allen has a mix of Southern charm and worldly experience that make him a great teacher,” remarked one former student. Another stressed Allen’s affability and willingness to give extra help outside of class: “I felt like I had a standing coffee appointment with him just to chat.”

SUSAN H. IRONS  
Senior lecturer of English and comparative literature  
- Faculty member 1999  
- Field of research Literature of the American South, American literature before 1900, business communication  
- Little known fact  “I’m basically a vegetarian — with one exception: barbecue. Where I grew up (Perquimans County), barbecue was a comfort food. I can still bite into a barbecue sandwich and feel good childhood associations flood over me.”

Teaching philosophy  “My greatest strength as a teacher is my enthusiasm for my subject matter and the dynamics of the classroom. Teaching is my professional passion. I endeavor to create an intellectual climate, fuel critical thinking, insist on analysis, share knowledge and mentor students. I offer my students enthusiasm, expertise, respect, accessibility, fairness and multiple challenges. Then I work to help them develop the resources and strategies to meet the challenges. It’s a partnership, a collaboration, which brings rich rewards.”

- Excerpts from award citation  “Susan Irons is the rare colleague who is as charming as she is intelligent, as kind to her students as she is challenging.” … “The learning environment she creates is as inviting as it is rigorous.” … A fellow teacher sums up: “We are lucky to have this accomplished and knowledgeable instructor teaching our undergraduates. … As a mentor, Dr. Irons was generous with her time, her knowledge and her heart.”

JEANNIE LOEB  
Senior lecturer of psychology  
- Faculty member 2005  
- Field of research Behavioral neuroscience  
- Little known fact  “I learned English from watching ‘Sesame Street.’ I still think Count Dracula is ‘the man!’”

Teaching philosophy  “Amidst the rigor of UNC graduate school, I had almost forgotten that learning was fun. I was enthusiastically reminded of this in Dr. Abigail Panter’s class, studying, of all things, statistics! I still remember my skit’s punchline, ‘Statistics are the whip that Santa uses to make the reindeer run faster!’”

- Excerpts from award citation  “Susan Irons is the rare colleague who is as charming as she is intelligent, as kind to her students as she is challenging.” … “The learning environment she creates is as inviting as it is rigorous.” … A fellow teacher sums up: “We are lucky to have this accomplished and knowledgeable instructor teaching our undergraduates. … As a mentor, Dr. Irons was generous with her time, her knowledge and her heart.”

WEI YOU  
Assistant professor of chemistry  
- Faculty member 2006  
- Field of research Organic solar cells, organic spintronics, molecular electronics, organic electronics and devices, biomaterials  
- Little known fact  “I am an animal lover.”

Teaching philosophy  “Engage, engage and engage! You want them to learn how to think critically.”

- Excerpts from award citation  “Engage, engage and engage! Why engage students? Because this practice will convincingly show students that you genuinely care about their own success in the subject, thus your enthusiasm will inspire the students’ true interest in learning the subject. The ones who raise their hands every time you have an in-class question usually perform well, it is those who never volunteer to answer questions and flounder that need more of your attention. Effectively engaging those students is challenging, but very rewarding.”

Inspiring ... deeply committed ... the essence of outstanding teaching

The awards were created in 1952 with a bequest by the children of Lola Spencer and Simpson Bobo Tanner in memory of their parents. The awards recognize excellence in inspirational teaching of undergraduate students, particularly first- and second-year students.

Tanner Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching by Graduate Teaching Assistants

In 1990, the University expanded the purview of the Tanner Awards to recognize excellence in the teaching of undergraduates by graduate teaching assistants. The 2011 winners were:

- ERIKA BAGLEY  Psychology  
- MATT CARLSON  English and comparative literature  
- NATALIE FIXMER-ORAIZ  Communication studies  
- TED GELLAR-GOAD  Classics  
- ELIZABETH GREENE  Classics

Excerpts from award citation  “Engaging, engaging and engaging! Why engage students? Because this practice will convincingly show students that you genuinely care about their own success in the subject, thus your enthusiasm will inspire the students’ true interest in learning the subject. The ones who raise their hands every time you have an in-class question usually perform well, it is those who never volunteer to answer questions and flounder that need more of your attention. Effectively engaging those students is challenging, but very rewarding.”

- Excerpts from award citation  “Engage, engage and engage! Why engage students? Because this practice will convincingly show students that you genuinely care about their own success in the subject, thus your enthusiasm will inspire the students’ true interest in learning the subject. The ones who raise their hands every time you have an in-class question usually perform well, it is those who never volunteer to answer questions and flounder that need more of your attention. Effectively engaging those students is challenging, but very rewarding.”
Distinguished Teaching Awards for Post-Baccalaureate Teaching and Mentoring

GREGORY FLAXMAN Associate professor of English and comparative literature, adjunct professor of communication studies
- Faculty member 2003
- Field of expertise Theory: philosophy and critical theory, psychoanalysis, narrative theory and aesthetics; cinema: film and genre theory, classical Hollywood and post-classical American cinema; literature: postwar American fiction, postcolonial literature
- Little-known fact "My first job out of college was as a film reviewer for The Boston Phoenix."
- Teaching philosophy "Whatever the discipline, whether I'm working in philosophy, literary theory or film studies, I'm committed to teaching challenging texts that defy common sense. In my experience, students at almost every level respond to the challenge of theoretical difficulty and formal innovation — but they do so on the condition that I meet this challenge myself. Only when I demonstrate rigor and responsibility as a teacher can I expect as much from students. Ultimately, the classroom remains the best test for the clarity of my own thinking and writing."
- Excerpts from award citation Flaxman distinguishes himself as a teacher and mentor not only through his charismatic teaching, but also through his extreme passion and dedication to mentoring doctoral students. He consistently puts forth the extra effort and demonstrates "unflagging support and advocacy for graduate students, and immense generosity of time and spirit."

MELISSA SHAFFER MILLER Assistant professor of special education in the School of Education
- Faculty member 2007
- Field of expertise Special education: prevention and remediation of academic and behavioral difficulties
- Little-known fact "I lived in Alaska for two years where I had the unique opportunity to work with at-risk students and students with severe disabilities in a wilderness survival program."
- Teaching philosophy "I teach and advise students so that I model not only best instructional practices in special education, but also skills necessary to become future leaders in the field of education. This is accomplished by teaching in ways that motivate, challenge and support student learning, while also emphasizing the importance of leadership. I balance between presenting theory and opportunities for practice, because knowledge cannot be created without theory and without theory there can be no application that generates knowledge."
- Excerpts from award citation One student wrote that Miller "continues to challenge me, and continues to remind me that teaching is so much more than instruction. It is developing trust through compassion and sincerity. Without trust, teaching is handicapped. Dr. Miller has my full trust and because of this I am confident in pushing toward my goal knowing that I am not alone in my endeavor. This type of inspiration is truly contagious and should be admired and rewarded." ... Another student wrote, "You feel loyal to her and to UNC. She motivates you to want to be better as a human being, a woman/man, a participant in society, and a leader in the profession."

ALAN NELSON Professor of philosophy
- Faculty member 2006
- Field of expertise History of modern philosophy
- Little-known fact "After a 35-year moral commitment to being vegetarian, I've recently become vegan."
- Teaching philosophy "Graduate students need to be confident in their work while being rigorously self-critical. The right balance can be very difficult to achieve. I try to help them find it by judiciously combining positive guidance with constructive criticism."
- Excerpts from award citation Nelson "has an almost preternatural ability to understand his students’ needs, strengths and weaknesses, and in light of this, he possesses a seemingly limitless ability to elicit the best work from his students." ... He has worked tirelessly to foster intellectual community among students and to push each student to "proceed with confidence." His students feel that "he seems to understand the individual changing needs of each of his graduate students as they progress through various stages of their professional development." ... Nelson is tirelessly patient with students who seek to better understand the field of philosophy. ... "It is quite extraordinary to be involved with a school of thought that is almost a movement."

JOHN E. PAUL Clinical associate professor of health policy and management in the Gillings School of Global Public Health
- Faculty member 2005
- Field of expertise Health care organization behavior
- Little-known fact "Peace Corps service in Nepal provided my first 'up-close and personal' introduction to the challenges of public health."
- Teaching philosophy "In graduate and professional schools, teaching and mentoring are two sides of the same coin. Mentoring, therefore, is an integral part of my teaching philosophy. Additionally, my work and management experience, along with that of the students, provides examples relevant to discussions and activities in the classroom. My teaching and mentoring philosophy drives me to be enthusiastic, experience-based, collaborative and technologically savvy. These characteristics are continually developed and refined through interesting and productive engagement with my students."
- Excerpts from award citation Paul actively explores new teaching methods and emerging technologies to best help his students learn, and to prepare them for successful careers in health-care policy and management. ... Beyond being an accomplished teacher, Paul sincerely cares about his students. He frequently participates in and supports student-led events. Whether it is meeting after hours, continued contact with and mentoring of recent early-career graduates, or sharing his wife's home-baked cookies, Paul distinguishes himself as “fostering excellence with a warm heart.” Shared learning and collegialship are critical for the intellectual community he strives to nurture.
About the awards

This year, the 53-member Teaching Awards Committee considered nearly 400 nominations for awards to honor distinguished teaching by faculty and graduate students at the University.

Throughout the process we were deeply impressed with the number of faculty and graduate students engaged in teaching undergraduates and graduates using diverse strategies — inside and outside the classroom walls. Committee members shared their stories of the innovation with which faculty pursues the University’s teaching mission, according to its 1789 charter: “To consult the happiness of a rising generation, and endeavor to fit them for an honourable discharge of the social duties of life, by paying the strictest attention to their education.”

It has been an honor to serve as chair of one of the hardest-working committees on campus; it has been a great privilege to help identify the work of the 23 award recipients who received special recognition this year. We are all in debt to the winners, all the nominees, and the members of the Teaching Awards Committee for their extraordinary work at Carolina.

— Rachel Willis, committee chair; Bowman and Gordon Gray Associate Professor of American Studies

CHAPMAN FAMILY AWARDS

The Chapman Teaching Awards were created in 1993 with a gift by Max Carrol Chapman Jr. ’66 on behalf of the Chapman family, to honor distinguished teaching of undergraduate students.

MICHIE TRACY BERGER

Associate professor of women’s studies

Faculty member 2002

Field of expertise Women’s political participation on HIV/AIDS issues; community based, intergenerational HIV/AIDS prevention programs for mothers and their adolescent daughters; the professionalization of women’s and gender studies students

Little-known fact “I am a professional coach and creative writer. In 2004, I launched The Creative Tickle®, a coaching practice that helps individuals and organizations to understand and harness the power of creativity. I write a blog called ‘The Practice of Creativity’: micheleberger.wordpress.com.”

Teaching philosophy “My teaching has focused on providing students opportunities to define, develop and exercise their creative thinking and creative problem-solving skills. The utility of creative thinking is no longer just for artists; it is a critical competency for the 21st century. Recent surveys of employers suggest that graduates’ creativity skills are often underdeveloped. My classes work to develop interdisciplinary thinking, imagination and innovation so that students are prepared to apply their training to current technological, political and societal challenges.”

Excerpts from award citation Berger is an exemplary teacher, whether in making a large class feel like a conversation held in an intimate space or in promoting a meaningful discussion about the complex assignments she places in front of more advanced students. ... The manner in which she shares what she knows proceeds from a wellspring of generosity and enthusiasm.

KELLY HOGAN

Lecturer of biology

Faculty member 2004

Field of expertise Using technology and active learning in large introductory biology and genetics classes

Excerpts from award citation Hogan packs each class period with an unending series of active inquiry activities that engage students in ways that keep each one individually involved. Clearly one who pours herself into her teaching, Hogan continuously displays a highly organized and masterful use of a wide range of pedagogical methods and innovative technologies. In addition to her exceptional talents and creativity as a teacher, she also serves as an unofficial mentor for Carolina Covenant scholars, particularly those majoring in the sciences. She is committed to ensuring that all students have the greatest opportunity to perform to their full abilities.

LENSING

Mann Family Professor of English and Comparative Literature

Faculty member 1969

Field of expertise Twentieth century British and American poetry

Little-known fact “For the past 16 years, I have been president of the Inner-Church Council Housing Corp., owner of 78 units of affordable housing at two locations in Chapel Hill, now in the middle of a $4 million rehab.”

Teaching philosophy “I hope that some of my own love of poetry, particularly that of the 20th century, carries over into my teaching. Over the years I have changed my own sense of how best to teach it. I used to think that the purpose of the professor was to connect the students directly with the poem and its contexts and then get myself out of the way. I saw myself as a kind of transparent agent, I used to say. Now I’m much more involved through my own personal reactions, one who, I like to think, has read and reread the poems and come to know and love them. This brings a certain performative aspect into teaching. In addition to what I say about the poem, the poet and the culture surrounding both — and I have plenty to say about all three — it is finally my personal commitment to the poem that most directly engages the students and makes them want to appropriate it to their own lived experiences.”

Excerpts from award citation Generosity is a word often used to describe Lensing’s teaching. He shares his time and insights with patience, good humor and care, and his wit and caring nature have fostered inspired learning for decades of undergraduates.