1. Gitner Award for Distinguished Teaching in the College of Arts & Sciences: Claudio Rebbi

Claudio will be at the Faculty Meeting.

2. Neu Family Award for Excellence in Teaching in the College of Arts & Sciences: Wally Fulweiler

Wally is on a research trip in Spain. John Finnerty will accept her award. Dave Marchant, her mentor and champion, may be able to attend.

3. Frank and Lynne Wisneski Award for Excellence in Teaching in the College of Arts & Sciences: Carrie Preston

Carrie plans to be there, with grandmothers. If not, Gene Jarrett will accept her award.

4. College of Arts & Sciences Award for Distinction in First Year Undergraduate Education: Bill Marx and Tony Wallace

Bill and Tony will be there. Joint citation. Each gets his own framed copy and check.

5. College of Arts & Sciences Award for Distinction in First Year Undergraduate Education: Deborah Belle

Deborah will be there.

6. Dean's Award for Excellence in Graduate Education: Bruce Schulman

Bruce will be there with a posse of his graduate students.
The Gitner Award

Professor Claudio Rebbi

The Gitner Award for Distinguished Teaching in the College of Arts & Sciences was endowed by CAS alumnus and Trustee Emeritus Gerald Gitner.

Skeptics might question Claudio Rebbi’s explanation for why it took him so long to request his first sabbatical, fully twenty years after he was recruited away from Brookhaven National Lab as a coveted high-energy physicist and professor with tenure. It was, Professor Rebbi wrote in that belated first application, “mostly out of love for teaching.” Skeptics might also assume that Professor Rebbi’s students remember him most fondly for the fabulous cookies he serves in office hours. On both counts, the skeptics would be wrong: Professor Rebbi does love teaching, and, to a person, his students love, or “super-love,” learning from him. The cookies are a bonus.

Reading Professor Rebbi’s course evaluations is an inspiring experience, regardless of whether the course at hand is Principles of Physics, Intermediate Mechanics, or Introduction to Computational Physics. Semester in, semester out, without skipping a beat even during his recent term as department chair, he has earned near-perfect, even perfect, numerical scores. Students’ comments likewise convey a groundswell of enthusiasm to which selective quotation cannot do justice. Superlatives abound: fantastic; amazing; great; awesome; exceptional; wonderful; incredible; really, really cool; my favorite; one of the best; one of the finest; one of a kind.

Specifics read like a what’s what of pedagogical excellence, beginning with appreciation for Professor Rebbi’s vast insight and knowledge, about which one student writes: “The man knows everything.” His ability to make challenging material accessible comes in for equally high praise: he is “great at explaining concepts, helping with questions, and guiding thought processes.” Well organized and paced, his intermediate syllabus builds effectively on prior courses, bringing a welcome modern twist to classical mechanics. Every lecture is impeccably prepared; all assignments are relevant; he is funny and approachable; he grades fast and fairly. What, in virtually every evaluation, ties those encomia together is students’ sense of how sincerely Professor Rebbi cares about them, how dedicated he is to their understanding, and how determined that they will succeed. That means “checking often [during lecture] to see if anyone has fallen behind in the logic of a problem,” adjusting office hours “so he can see you,” and, for each of his courses, developing an “incredibly useful” set of notes and electronic resources.

Even while finally on sabbatical, Professor Rebbi continued to work on perfecting those signature materials. The 2013 Gitner Award thus celebrates 27 straight years of his going the extra mile, out of love for students’ learning physics.

Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences

May 15, 2013
The Neu Family Award

Professor Robinson (Wally) Fulweiler

The Neu Family Award for Excellence in Teaching in the College of Arts & Sciences is the gift of Richard Neu (CLA ’61) and his daughter Amy (CAS ’96).

Wally Fulweiler is “an inspiration.” Colleagues from her departments of Earth & Environment and Biology stand in awe of Professor Fulweiler’s drive, dedication, and achievements in “all facets” of science education. As a classroom lecturer on ecosystems ecology and marine geochemistry, she “shoots” into action, making every minute count toward her comprehensive presentation. A colleague describes her teaching “as though her hair were on fire.” Students are indeed inspired: “She really explains concepts fully, really encourages questions, and gets you invested in the material.”

Professor Fulweiler manages to make high expectations “cool.” At every level of the curriculum, she sets demands and provides opportunities that are typically reserved for more advanced courses. Graduate students are required to write journal-ready papers; undergraduates taking entry-level oceanography, many for divisional studies credit, get out into the field and gather their own data. In turn, Marine Science majors in her intensive field course on coastal biogeochemistry gain experience with cutting edge techniques and have presented their findings at a full-day symposium organized by Professor Fulweiler for the broader BU scientific community. About that final challenge, to make one’s research clear and important to non-experts, a student writes: “It pushed me the most but I learned the most.”

Even more impressive is the extent to which, as mentor and role model, Professor Fulweiler has involved students in building a vibrant new interdisciplinary research program in coastal nutrients. At 25 and growing, the Fulweiler group of graduate, UROP, directed study, honors, and volunteering students combines the best of family with a well-oiled machine. There can be no mistaking what it means to wear the “Fulweiler Lab” T-shirt, such are the excitement and purpose Professor Fulweiler infuses into her mentoring. Her group is fabled for its long hours, cohesion, energetic discussions, and results. Her students have won prestigious fellowships and awards for best presentation, including at an international conference; graduates of her lab have gone on to top PhD programs and high-profile post-doctoral positions; volunteers tend to stay in the field.

In her further capacity as Associate Director of the Boston University Marine Program, Professor Fulweiler has played a key role in defining BUMP’s mission and investigating new options for expeditionary learning. Here, as in the classroom, the field, and the lab, this most deserving recipient of the 2013 Neu Family Award shows the way to focus on two basic questions: the “why” of science, and the “why not” of science education.

Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences

May 15, 2013
The Frank and Lynne Wisneski Award

Professor Carrie J. Preston

The Frank and Lynne Wisneski Award for Excellence in Teaching in the College of Arts & Sciences honors their daughter, Corey Wisneski, a 1999 graduate in Anthropology.

Carrie Preston aims high: to be the kind of English and gender studies teacher whose students leave her courses not only reading, writing, and thinking better, but with their lives transformed, and able to look at the world, critically and creatively, in new ways.

In pursuit of those aims, Professor Preston teaches with consummate technical artistry, informed by bold interdisciplinary scholarship and vision. Her range of courses is extensive, focusing in variable proportions on canonical literary Modernism, on contemporary theories of gender performance, and on her study of dancers and dance forms from Isadora Duncan to Japanese Noh. She teaches beginning-to-advanced English majors, graduate students, WGS minors, and exploratory students—all to vivid acclaim. Regularly cited as a role model, she exemplifies rare combinations: of passion with intellectual rigor; daunting assignments with effective guidance; brilliance and polish with welcoming encouragement; and exemplary organization, clarity, and logic with deft responsiveness to students’ sometimes off-the-wall classroom comments. As to whether her teaching is in fact transformative, one student answers for many with a resounding yes: “I learned more about writing, drama, the world, subversive forces, and about myself than I ever thought possible. She is the most inspiring person I have ever met.”

Among the many probing questions Professor Preston equips students to investigate, none is more central to her pedagogic creativity than that of the connection between critical theory and activism. As part of her course on “Feminist and Gender Theories and Movements,” students are asked to design an activist, not necessarily feminist, project of each individual’s own choosing. That academic exercise has, more than once, given rise to real activism and change. A first outgrowth was “Genderfest,” now an annual student-run program of public events; a second was the successful student-led campaign to establish a Sexual Assault Response and Prevention Center on the BU campus.

Typically, whatever role she played in her students’ well-researched 70-page brief and oral arguments for the Center, Professor Preston takes little credit for their success. The quality and impact of her teaching are the greater for her unstinting generosity—as a guest lecturer, co-teacher, award-winning academic advisor, supervisor and reader of dissertations and directed studies, faculty sponsor of undergraduate student organizations, chair of the WGS Task Force on Graduate Education, and more. In Carrie Preston, the 2013 Wisneski Award honors a teacher of extraordinary gifts and giving.

Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences

May 15, 2013
College of Arts & Sciences Award
For Distinction in First Year Undergraduate Education
William Marx and Anthony Wallace

This award recognizes a member of the CAS faculty for excellence in teaching, mentoring and/or other contributions to the undergraduate First Year Experience.

Before there was an all-Boston University arts initiative, there was the dynamic duo of Writing Program Senior Lecturers William Marx and Anthony Wallace. Both are gifted and dedicated teachers, distinguished by the special talents each of them brings to his popular and effective WR seminars — Tony as a prize-winning writer of fiction, Bill as, for three decades, a journalist writing about arts and culture for print, broadcast, and online. Singly, they help strengthen the Writing Program for all students through Bill’s journal, The Arts Fuse, and Tony’s stalwart leadership among the faculty.

Together, Tony and Bill have been unstoppable since they teamed up in 2010 to design, pitch, and teach “The Theater Now,” a WR 100 seminar in which students, most in their first semester, studied plays and attended performances of them at the BU Theatre and in the city of Boston. Aiming for something “more academically substantive than a fieldtrip,” Tony and Bill began arranging for post-performance panel discussions with playwrights, actors, and directors from the Huntington Theatre Company and other local stages. Theirs was an experiment in enhancing “motivation as well as material for the writing assignments at the heart of all WR courses.” It worked. By year two, they had recruited three more teachers and secured College funding to expand the range of Boston area productions from which they select each semester’s three-play “season.”

Hundreds of “Theater Now” students later, with the accruing support of their Director, Dean, and Provost, Tony and Bill continue, tirelessly and infectiously, to sustain and develop the model, and to extend it. Men on a mission to promote full-scale engagement with the arts, they have helped other writing teachers create “Boston Now” courses on jazz; contemporary writing; and, coming next year, poetry; opera; and museums.

From the beginnings of “Theater Now” to the flourishing of “Arts Now,” Tony and Bill have intentionally aligned their initiative with the overarching goals of the CAS First Year Experience. “Arts Now” activities establish enriching first points of contact on the campus and in the city. They give freshmen a chance to interact in a meaningful way, beyond the boundaries of individual classrooms, with faculty, with one another, and with cultural institutions. William Marx and Anthony Wallace have not only planted a flag for the arts at Boston University. By dint of exceptional enthusiasm, vision, and hard work, they have achieved great distinction in first year undergraduate education.

Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences

May 15, 2013
College of Arts & Sciences Award
For Distinction in First Year Undergraduate Education
Professor Deborah Belle

This award recognizes a member of the CAS faculty for excellence in teaching, mentoring and/or other contributions to the undergraduate First Year Experience.

A teacher and mentor of great skill and utmost respect for all students, Deborah Belle has recently been celebrating her 30 years on the Psychology faculty in typical fashion: with the addition of four new courses to her repertoire. Two are seminars drawing on her research interest in the roots and experience of poverty; one of those, repeated by popular demand, marks BU’s first ever participation in teaching for the Boston area Graduate Consortium in Women’s Studies. The remaining courses, an ambitious two-semester sequence particularly intended for first-year students, may break new ground nationally.

As director of the then Women’s Studies Program, Professor Belle led a team of faculty colleagues from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences in dreaming up a contribution to general education that would also provide a gateway to the reconfigured minor in Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies. Countless hours of learning from each other later, the sequence they developed, WS 101/102, explores how bodies, social and cultural experiences, and imaginative constructions affect what it means to be women and men. With direct bearing on the individual, social, and intellectual development of 18-year-olds, the course gives them knowledge and tools to reexamine key assumptions and beliefs, and their role in shaping human institutions, including science and scholarship.

Thanks to Professor Belle’s resilient leadership, discussions within the design and teaching team remain spirited, but firmly committed to a big idea: not simply to juxtapose materials and methods from multiple disciplines. Instead, WS 101/102 seeks a genuine integration of approaches, while acknowledging that the “object” under scrutiny looks different from different disciplinary perspectives. The path-breaking integration of serious natural science, in particular, has established WS 101/102, both within BU and beyond, as a model of fully interdisciplinary arts and sciences education.

To welcome and orient the first WS 101 class in Fall 2011, Professor Belle came up with another inspired and inspiring idea. During a boat cruise on the Charles River, students and faculty got to know each other informally, while she also pointed out landmarks of interest: Cambridge City Hall, for example, in respect to the nation’s first licenses for same-sex marriages. The riverboat cruise is a keeper. WS 101/102 has been lucky in its lead author. Deborah Belle’s plotting and staying the course with great imagination and integrity redound to the lasting benefit of her students, collaborators, and college.

Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences

May 15, 2013
College of Arts & Sciences
Dean's Award for Excellence in Graduate Education
Professor Bruce J. Schulman

This award recognizes a member of the CAS faculty whose commitment to excellence in graduate teaching, mentoring, and/or curriculum development has contributed significantly to the quality of education in the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences.

Bruce Schulman “has organized much, if not most of his professional identity around an unusually passionate dedication to graduate training.” While not quite as provocative as his nominator’s consequent admonition to the Dean’s Award selection committee to “look no further,” the claim made about Professor Schulman’s commitment to graduate training might look exaggerated in view of his other identities as a much decorated scholar of American political history and social change, as a superb craftsman of lectures for undergraduates, and as a leading proponent of K-12 outreach. The committee did look further, at a number of strong nominations, and had finally to agree: when it comes to educating and mentoring the next generation of historians, Professor Schulman leaves no stone unturned and has achieved truly surpassing excellence.

In his own graduate courses, he assigns difficult and challenging material, and demands originality. The so-called “Think Pieces” he requires instantiate his belief that every student has the capacity to advance bold theses that challenge prevailing opinions and set new research directions. For his department’s whole cohort of graduate students, he has initiated comprehensive programming under the auspices of the American Political History Institute. During monthly seminars and lunches with invited guests, students are exposed to leading edge scholarship; they have access to research travel funds; they may spend a semester in England through an exchange program with Cambridge University; and they host an annual conference in political history with participants from all over the country and overseas. Teaching Fellows under Professor Schulman’s tutelage are not relegated to grading papers and holding discussion sections. He meets with them at least once a week to discuss material and teaching methodology. Each apprentice is required to craft and deliver a lecture, with a following critique from the master.

He must be doing something right: students flock to work with him. At 26 and counting, nearly all of the graduates whose dissertations he has supervised are thriving in academia. As the inaugural winner of this Dean’s Award for Excellence in Graduate Education, Bruce Schulman sets a high bar — with only the further caveat from his nominator that none of the above could possibly capture his “singular ability to inspire, to challenge, to educate, and to befriend.”

Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences

May 15, 2013