

The Gitner Award

Associate Professor Walter Hopp

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

Walter Hopp teaches undergraduates, from PH 100 on up, across a tongue-twisting constellation of areas in philosophy: phenomenology, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and metaphysics. The first to admit that “thinking philosophically is not something we do naturally,” he relishes the chance to awaken the philosophical capacity and interests of our students. How brilliantly he succeeds is an observable phenomenon that students themselves have taken to calling the “Hopp effect.”

Professor Hopp’s course evaluations overflow with superlatives. His syllabi are “minutely thought through.” He is an “extraordinarily,” nay “crystal clear” presenter, with a “great facility for taking questions,” “impressive stamina in the face of interrogation,” and “a remarkable ability to command a discussion and let it evolve through student responses.” He doesn’t just teach *about* philosophy: his essay and notebook assignments require students to produce philosophical arguments on a regular basis along with rigorous analysis of their own ways of thinking and acting.” He gets high marks for “accessibility during and in addition to office hours” and special praise as a writing coach. A senior thesis writer recalls how he “actively kept me away from philosophical mistakes, but not in a way that stifled my creativity.” He encourages students to present papers at conferences and has proudly mentored several CAS Writing Award winners.

Philosophy Department colleagues report their own remarkable encounters with the Hopp effect. Going in to teach, they often can’t help but overhear the buzz among students — not about music, sports, or dorm life, but about “what Hopp said this morning.” Peer observations are of “a high-octane performance, by turns hilarious and serious, but always rooted in a deep concern with the philosophical material and with students and their lives. [...] Walter strikes a remarkable balance between what he has to say and what he listens for from our students. The effect is to draw [them] very deeply into a conversation that many of them credit with changing not just their understanding of key philosophical positions, but also their larger views on life and what matters in it. A student in his Existentialism class said: ‘This course has changed the way I think about the world and my relation to it.’ A student in his recent course on phenomenology says: ‘Loved this class...Philosophy professors have a reputation for being not real people — Walter totally dispels that.’ Said another (actually many, the only variance being the number of exclamation marks): ‘WALTER ROCKS!!!’”

Says Walter Hopp himself: “I just really love students.” For rocking the life of the mind like no other, he richly deserves this 2015 Gitner Award for Distinguished Teaching.

April 27, 2015

Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences

The Neu Family Award

Dr. E. Manher Q. Jariwala

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).

Physics Lecturer Manher Jariwala is a man on a pedagogical mission of ever-expanding scope and impact. An outstanding instructor in his own right, he earns near-perfect numerical scores from the large, captive audiences who take introductory physics as a requirement for other majors in science and engineering. As if to silence the skeptics, one student writes: "Yes, he WILL know your name — before the first class — and he WILL help you do well in physics." Another student adds, "Trust me, if electromagnetism doesn't agree with you, take his class and it will." A third student commends his "inspiring" dedication. A fourth "can't ever justify cutting class because it's a pleasure to learn." A fifth concludes: "Helpful, approachable, and engaging. One of the best at BU."

Dr. Jariwala's innovative pedagogy ensures that his courses are truly student-centered by thoughtfully incorporating a full range of active learning tools and approaches. He uses online pre-lectures and homework, clicker questions, and worksheets to generate in-lecture discussion, unearth misconceptions, gauge students' progress, and force them to interact with each other as they search for answers. Instead of simply marching through the material, he solicits feedback throughout the semester and adjusts accordingly. In the classroom, "he listens to everything students have to say about which concepts are difficult"; likewise, in office hours, "he will listen to what you say and act on it." Overall, "the amount of dedication he puts into each student is outstanding."

Colleagues on his PY 211–212 teaching team are only the first to benefit from Dr. Jariwala's consummate vocation and far-flung influence as a teacher of teachers and creator of learning communities. He has been heavily involved in collaborations with SED to train urban science teachers at all levels. He has developed MOOC materials and TF Mentoring programs on the Charles River and Medical campuses as key elements of BU's participation in the national CIRTl initiative to prepare graduate students for success in future academic careers. This past year, he oversaw the launch of PRISM, a peer-mentoring program that matches senior physics majors with incoming freshmen. Perhaps most influentially, he is a founder of the BU Learning Assistant (LA) program and director of its physics component. Undergraduates selected as LA's learn the basics of pedagogy by taking an SED course and get into a classroom where they can experience teaching for themselves and improve their content knowledge by helping fellow students overcome confusions. Dr. Jariwala has given invited talks and organized regional and national meetings to expand the LA model to other colleges and universities.

His students think of Manher Jariwala as the "epitome of a 'must have' instructor." With this Neu Family Award, we also recognize him as a CAS leader in STEM education.

April 27, 2015

Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences

The Frank and Lynne Wisneski Award

Assistant Professor Catherine Connell

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.

Current students and young alums in impressive numbers and vivid detail recall their first sociology course with Cati Connell as having changed the trajectory of their college lives. But for the inspiration of her eye-opening pedagogy and its substantive focus on the social organization of identities and inequalities, any given student might not have minored, majored, or pursued honors research in Sociology, learned how to bring academic concepts to bear on the day-to-day, ventured “outside my comfort zone” and thought about “how I constructed my comfort zone in the first place,” gotten involved in social justice issues, or critically questioned “things I believed to be absolute truths.”

Students are understandably “blown away by Professor Connell’s passion and talent for teaching.” “Fascinating” readings, combined with “incredibly creative assignments,” challenge students to expand their horizons and “think in new ways.” One student describes the zine her class created in SO 240 (Sexuality and Social Life) as “the coolest assignment I have done during my [eight semesters] here.” Professor Connell has a “genuine way” of relating to students. She balances “intellectual intensity” and “high expectations” with confidence in students’ abilities and “obvious willingness” to support and advocate for them. A “dynamic lecturer,” she excels, even in 80-seat classes, at leading debates that spill over into office hours. In seminars, including the research practicum she designed to expand and improve the Sociology Honors Program, her “facilitation style is a model that students carefully observe” and emulate. Thanks to her probing questions, self-positioning “as a steady anchor of theory and methods,” and “diligence” in creating a “safe environment” for exploring sensitive and stigmatized topics, students stretch their intellectual muscles with a growing sense of responsibility and passion for their own learning. Writes one student: “We continued to raise the bar every class as we dug deeper and deeper into re-thinking the role of a sociologist.”

Professor Connell intends for her teaching to reach beyond the classroom. And it does. She is a sought after faculty advisor to student groups and supervisor of undergraduate and graduate theses. She has led workshops on LGBTQ issues, and her courses have, in turn, informed student-led initiatives to foster a more just and activist student community at Boston University. Q: BU’s Queer Activist Collective got started when a couple of SO 240 students were “so inspired by readings in class that they wanted...to keep the conversation going.” In addition to this institutional legacy, the shining example of Professor Connell’s teaching carries over as a touchstone into individual students’ post-college lives. “Lessons I learned about research, clear writing, and praxis-based academic work come up every day,” writes one alum, whose recommendation of Cati Connell for a College teaching award concludes: “I would engrave [it] myself if I could.”

April 27, 2015

Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences

***College of Arts & Sciences Award
for Distinction in First Year Undergraduate Education
Dr. Sarah Madsen Hardy***

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

What Senior Lecturer Sarah Madsen Hardy has accomplished for the good of the Writing Program and its thousands of first year students sets a lofty standard for curriculum coordinators everywhere in the College. Taking that coordinator's role beyond established routines to imaginative, purposeful innovation, she drew on a decade of successful, highly reflective teaching and engagement with scholarship on writing and research pedagogy; she identified a set of overarching challenges and aspirations for BU's Writing Program and undergraduate writing generally; she piloted protocols for testing new curriculum in her own courses; and, in 2012, she led her colleagues into the era of "WRX," a broad initiative supporting thoughtful experiments in WR course design.

Before WRX, Dr. Madsen Hardy had already made her mark in and beyond the Writing Program. She helped develop the program's use of e-portfolios, focus on information literacy, and collaboration with public school teachers. She co-edited *WR*, the Writing Program's journal of exemplary writing; and she mentored several Boston Community Service scholars. Her importance to the first year experience still begins in the classroom. She has created seminars that appeal to students' interests, as well as studios for the Kilachand Honors Program. Students who "usually hate writing," praise her "thorough feedback," ability to interest them in the writing process, and knack for both pushing and supporting. Says one student: "I worked so hard in this class, but Sarah never overwhelmed us." Adds another: "She taught us things that will last a lifetime."

Dr. Madsen Hardy's crowning achievement, WRX, encourages faculty to propose experimental sections of WR 100 or 150 that respond to well-defined challenges such as BU's increasing international and ESL populations or that realize aspirations like engagement with the city of Boston. Successful experiments scale up for clusters of courses, so that they can be improved through testing with other students. Active clusters include "Mediated Integration," which brings non-native and native English language learners together in a deliberate way; "Creative Composition," in which students compose both academic and creative texts while engaging with local writers and poets; and "Research in the Public Sphere," where students perform a collaborative research project for a real client. Dr. Madsen Hardy chairs the largest cluster, "Genre and Audience," which aims, inter alia, to transform students' understanding of "research" in a Google-driven world. Just two years in, WRX has enlisted 19 faculty members, fostered meaningful inventiveness and cross-pollination, enhanced the training of graduate writing fellows, and served well over 700 undergraduates — due cause for celebration and recognition of Sarah Madsen Hardy with this College of Arts & Sciences Award.

April 27, 2015

Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences

Arts & Sciences
Dean's Award for Excellence in Graduate Education
Assistant Professor Peter Buston

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

Since he arrived in 2010, behavioral, population, and marine ecologist Peter Buston has made remarkably quick work of establishing himself as a premiere graduate teacher, mentor, program-builder *extraordinaire*, and magnet for outstanding graduate students.

Professor Buston's lucid, believable, infectiously enthusiastic account of why he loves to teach is a perfect illustration of why he's so good at it. Undergraduates in BI 260, his large introduction to marine biology, describe him as "extraordinarily clear, honest, and thoughtful." "Never a dull moment" is how they recommend the course itself, testimony to his riveting way with "simple facts and big ideas." His program for recruiting future biologists includes a three-year 'curriculum' he has designed for undergraduate members of the Buston lab, which also welcomes advisees from the K-12 Science Club for Girls.

At the graduate level, Professor Buston has so far surpassed expectations that he already chairs the Biology Department's Graduate Committee. His first assignment, brilliantly executed, was to fill a curricular gap for PhD students in Biology's EBE wing. The core course he developed on theoretical evolutionary biology was an instant hit, earning a perfect 5.0 instructor rating, with comments to match: "*Pete managed not only to spark an interest (which I hope to pursue in the future), but effectively teach it, from the broad scientific concepts down to the gritty mathematical details.*" Professor Buston next turned to improving the EBE program's overall quality and integration with two more new courses. BI 671 now introduces students to critical discussion of cutting edge research and includes a key component on grant writing. Students give much credit to Professor Buston's expert tutelage for their exceptional record of 10 NSF Graduate Research awards over the past three years. As for the second course, BI 579/580, where students present research ideas and preliminary data, now that it has become a permanent fixture of department life, colleagues wonder why they ever needed convincing by Pete of its importance.

No summary of his qualifications for this Dean's Award would be complete without a nod to the quality and success of Pete Buston's own graduate students. Their record of placing first-authored papers, landing dream jobs, and securing post-docs demonstrates how effectively he challenges them to strive for excellence, prepares them for the cooperative/competitive world of modern science, and treats each of them with at least as much regard for their individuality as for personality differences among the clown fish they study together in Boston and Belize.

April 27, 2015

Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences

Arts & Sciences
Dean's Award for Excellence in Graduate Education
Professor Susan Mizruchi

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

Susan Mizruchi has made a vocation and brilliant career of graduate education. In her 30 years of teaching American literature and (increasingly) film at Boston University, she has been first reader on an equal number of dissertations, and has served on a staggering total of 75 qualifying exam committees in English, American Studies and Religion. The sheer range and quantity of this engagement would be significant even without reference to the wisdom and skill of her mentoring or her scrupulous, unstinting dedication to each student with whom she agrees to work.

This work of shaping students' scholarly maturation and initiating them into the intellectual and professional life of the academy begins in Professor Mizruchi's seminars. A sampling of her seminar titles reflects her commitment to situating students at the forefront of vital developments in her field: "Death and Mourning in American Realism," "Gender and Ritual in the American Novel," "Feminist Theory," "Religion and Violence in American Culture," "Risk and Contemporary American Culture." Her talent for conceptualizing a course is not lost on students, who remark that her surprising juxtapositions of texts have enabled them to read the standard literary canon in new ways. Other frequently cited strengths of her seminars include incorporation of various media and interdisciplinary criticism, intense discussions during class and in one-on-one meetings, and structured training in applying theoretical texts to literary and cultural artifacts. In all of this, she refuses to accept "the commonplace," encouraging students to "push harder for original ideas." "So hard," says one student, "but so worth it."

Another student writes for many in extolling Professor Mizruchi's virtues as a dissertation advisor. She is an unfailing guide to more and less promising lines of inquiry; as a reader, she is incisive and demanding; she "sets high standards and makes me believe I can reach them"; and, "super-generous" with her encyclopedic knowledge of the profession, she provides "smart advice about how to prepare...for a difficult job market." Outcomes are telling: Among her past dissertation students, she counts faculty with tenure at NYU and UNC-Chapel Hill, holders of sought after long-term lectureships at Harvard and Stanford, and the Director of Research at the Academy of Arts and Sciences. For the others she has mentored who are still trying to get jobs or change jobs, publish articles, or revise their dissertations, she remains ready to guide them through interviews, campus visits, and contract negotiations — ever the model graduate teacher and advisor they flocked to in the first place.

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Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences