



# Harvard's Levenson Memorial Teaching Prize



Harvard's Levenson Memorial Teaching Prize for excellence in undergraduate teaching is awarded annually to one senior faculty member, to one junior faculty member, and to one teaching fellow. All Harvard undergraduates are invited to make nominations to the undergraduate council each year. Based on these, five or six nominees are selected as finalists in each category by a committee from the undergraduate council. A member of the undergraduate council argues the case for each finalist to the undergraduate council, which then selects the winner. The winner is announced at a dinner attended by the finalists, nominators, undergraduate council members, and representatives of the Levenson family.

## Citation for Professor Gerald Gabrielse



by Erica Farmer of the Harvard Undergraduate Council, 1 May 2000



When many students come to Harvard, they cite the quality of the professors here as one of the reasons they chose to attend. Senior faculty are often seen as the “height” of what it is to be a Harvard professor, honored as groundbreaking in their fields, engaged in important research projects, and survivors of the University’s often brutal tenure process. Yet, for many Harvard students, senior faculty are also seen as too immersed in their own academic projects to have the time or initiative to care about their undergraduate students. Year after year, a stereotype is perpetuated of the staid senior faculty member who is inaccessible and distant, perhaps teaching undergraduates, but largely unconcerned about who they are or with shaping their personal experiences. Luckily, this conception is certainly not always the case, and there really are senior faculty members who connect with their undergraduate students, are aware of their individual needs, and even inspire them, as evidenced by the many nominations our committee received in their honor.

The winner of this year’s senior faculty award is a striking example of this concern for students. In many of the nominations, the nominators highlight his patience and dedication to them, from arranging special drop-in Office Hours, scheduling field trips and tests to best accommodate their schedules, maintain communication, especially via email, and painstakingly creating colored transparencies and lecture notes to enliven course material. But perhaps more telling than all of these, are the reactions of his students to the course itself. His course is part of the core curriculum, and as such, consists of many students whose main interests and skills are not necessarily directed toward the subject matter. And among these students, he has managed to, nonetheless, instill a part of his passion and enthusiasm for his course.

One student writes “his dedication seems like the most natural thing in the world for him. He has put so much of himself into this class that, if there were no Levenson award, we’d have to make up our own award to show him how grateful we are for everything he’s done all semester.” Another claims that she was amazed not only that he spends hours preparing for an undergraduate lecture course but that he works so hard on a course whose students are not even science majors. These sentiments are echoed in the other nominations, all of which praise this professor for going out of his way to make sure his students both enjoy and understand the material he presents to them. And these students, many of whom expressed apprehension upon initially undertaking the course, are likely to leave it with a new appreciation for a subject which many admit to having previously

viewed with antipathy and even hatred. In sum, one of the nominations concludes, “All in all, this class I really feared has turned out to be great, even for a science neophyte like myself. I’m learning real-world information about how CD players, TVs, lasers, and nuclear power work, and I actually understand it. Yet I know if I have questions, I won’t be afraid to seek help. And that, I think, is as close to a perfect learning experience as you can get.”

So, in honor of his dedication and enthusiasm for his students, the 2000 Joseph R. Levenson teaching prize goes to Prof. Gerald Gabrielse of Science A-45: Reality Physics.



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## Council Recognizes Year's Best Teachers



◀ ERICA A. FARMER '01, a member of the Levenson Award Committee presents Professor of Physics GERALD GABRIELSE the award for best teaching by a Senior Faculty member. Crimson/Annie Wong

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By **DAVID C. NEWMAN**  
Crimson Staff Writer

A day after Springfest, the Undergraduate Council turned its attention from the MAC Quad to the classroom, honoring outstanding teachers last night at the annual Levenson Memorial Teaching Awards.

And for the second straight year, a professor of physics took home the Senior Faculty Award.

Students recognized this year's recipient, Professor of Physics Gerald Gabrielse, for his work teaching a Core class--Science A-45: "Reality Physics"--despite his status as a Senior Faculty member.

"He sacrificed a lot of himself and his sleep to make it a good class," said Megan K. Whyte '01, who was one of several students to nominate Gabrielse.

Gabrielse joked about his newly-won award.

"I was sure that teaching a Core class with 'Physics' in the title would make my ratings plummet and make me very unpopular," he quipped.

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