

Honors for Student-focused Teaching

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Don Gaver and Larry Powell are as different as their disciplines — biomedical engineering and history — but they are single-minded when it comes to a dedication to students. Tulane honored them with the President's Award for Excellence in Graduate and Professional Teaching at Saturday's (May 15) University Commencement Ceremony.



With a 32-year career at Tulane, history professor Larry Powell has guided numerous graduate students to successful academic careers. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

With a combined 52 years at Tulane, Powell, a history professor, and Gaver, professor and chair of biomedical engineering, have sent hundreds of graduate students to successful academic and scientific careers.

Their colleagues, as well as current and former graduate students, wrote commendation letters for the university's highest upper-level [teaching award](#) that provides to each one a medal and \$5,000.

"Teaching is not the right way to describe it," said Powell. "It's shepherding young historians into being full-fledged members of our guild. You guide them and hope to light some fire within them."

Gaver, who also holds the Alden J. "Doc" Laborde Chair in Biomedical Engineering, believes in treating his students like colleagues. "I can't teach and not be connected with my students," he says, adding that his most lasting contribution to graduate education "comes from direct mentorship of students in my laboratory."



Don Gaver, professor and chair of biomedical engineering, says he treats his students like colleagues. "I think of this as a community award," he says.

How do they define success? "When students are able to teach themselves," says Gaver, who often engages his classrooms in collaborative learning, in which students complete group projects and teach their classmates.

For Powell, success comes "when you see the dissertation, that accomplished piece of work," the result of many hours of guidance. "You're preparing the people who will replace us."

One student says Gaver is successful in encouraging new ideas and instilling "a curiosity for investigating." Powell's former students praise his "unflagging support," "insistence on sound scholarship" and being a "trusted mentor."

"I think of this as a community award," says Gaver. "No given faculty member does it by himself."