

First-class Teachers

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“The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson. This year’s four outstanding Tulane teachers have proven that art in the classroom. At the annual Unified Commencement Ceremony on Thursday (May 12), these faculty members were singled out as Tulane’s [best teachers](#) after nominations by colleagues and students universitywide. Two who teach undergraduates were named Weiss Presidential Fellows and two from the graduate level received President’s Awards. All were given medals and cash awards. *New Wave* celebrates their accomplishments with a look at each one.

New Weiss Fellow [Lev Kaplan](#) is an associate professor in physics and engineering physics, but despite those daunting topics, undergraduate students seek out his classes because of his engaging style of teaching. “I suspect he could teach quantum physics to an earthworm,” his department chair wrote in a nomination letter. Kaplan is the primary architect of a new program in engineering physics and designed Tulane’s dual-degree program with Vanderbilt and Johns Hopkins universities. A student wrote, “He really cares that his students learn.”

The best time in teaching, says English professor and Weiss award winner [Molly Rothenberg](#), occurs when she and her students “come to feel that we are on a journey of exploration together.” Also chair of the Department of English, she uses online discussion groups and Wiki sites to build communication with and between students. Her classroom has a “rigorous yet supportive atmosphere,” one colleague wrote in a nomination letter, while a student praised her “energy and absolute presence in class.”

[Stacy Overstreet](#) “exemplifies what graduate education should be at Tulane,” said her department chair in his nomination letter. An associate professor of psychology, she has served since 2004 as director of the accredited school psychology doctoral program. She has supervised numerous doctoral dissertations and master’s theses and is known as a supportive mentor who challenges her students. Overstreet “embodies a spirit of leadership, a caring attitude and a fervor for teaching,” a

student wrote.

[Dr. Richard Streiffer](#), professor of family and community medicine, is an inspiration to his students. This year he also won the medical school's Teaching Scholar Award. Streiffer was the founding chair of the Department of Family and Community Medicine and established the community-based family medicine clerkship as well as innovative programs to help expand primary care in rural areas. "He fulfills our best aspirations for a physician and for a teacher," wrote a colleague who nominated him.