

President's Awards Go to Dedicated Faculty Members

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Dynamic, unusual and interactive strategies mark the teaching methods of both Craig Clarkson, professor of pharmacology, and Laura Murphy, clinical associate professor of international health and development, the recipients of the President's Awards for Excellence in Graduate and Professional Teaching.



Craig Clarkson, right, professor of pharmacology, receives the President's Award from provost Michael Bernstein, left, and President Scott Cowen, center, at the commencement ceremony on Saturday (May 17). (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The awards, announced at Tulane's commencement ceremony at the Louisiana Superdome on Saturday (May 17), go to faculty members selected for their sustained and compelling record of excellence in teaching, learning and research.

Each recipient of the President's Awards receives a medal designed by the late Franklin Adams, professor emeritus of architecture, as well as \$5,000.

Clarkson, who arrived at Tulane in 1985 and has been the director of the medical pharmacology course in the School of Medicine for 10 years, says he feels honored to receive the award.

Clarkson is deeply committed to enhancing the quality of the medical pharmacology course and other courses in the school, and he has been tireless in implementing new approaches and methodologies. In recognition of his educational skills and student advocacy, the medical students' Owl Club previously has bestowed nine coveted outstanding teaching awards on Clarkson.

“My approach is very student-oriented, or learner-centered, rather than teacher-centered,” he says. “Teaching is standing up in front of the room and explaining things. Learning ? if it happens ? is a whole different process. We're trying different approaches all the time to try to enhance learning.”

To improve the learning process for his students, Clarkson uses attention-grabbing interactive technology. For example, he created a large database of interactive online quizzes.

“When students take a quiz and get an answer wrong, it will tell them why,” he says.

Clarkson also has developed educational podcasts, a medical pharmacology course website, online self-study tools, a series of DVD instructional videos, and more. Several new approaches, including “peer instruction” and “just-in-time teaching,” are currently under development for use in courses this fall, according to Clarkson.

Unfortunately, Murphy was unable to attend the commencement ceremony because she is in Nairobi, Kenya, conducting research on how the mobile phone is changing lives in an HIV/AIDS-affected village.

“I am delighted to be one of this year's recipients of the President's Awards,” says Murphy, who has worked around the world since 1983, started teaching courses in international health and development at the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine in 1999, and has been affiliated with the Stone Center for Latin American Studies since 2001. “It means a great deal to me.”



Because of her ongoing research in western Kenya, Laura Murphy was not able to receive her President's Award for teaching, but she was honored with the gift of a chicken from residents with whom she is working in a Kenyan village. (Photo courtesy of Laura Murphy)

Murphy, who e-mailed comments from an Internet caf  , says she began her teaching career feeling “nervous, uncertain and over-programmed.” But after 10 years teaching at Tulane, Murphy says she “has ended up student-focused, flexible and creative.”

“I value teaching's role in changing lives, both mine and my students,” she says.

Murphy teaches a variety of topics, including applied social sciences, research methods, development theory, the social impact of AIDS and population-environment theory.

She has designed a dozen new courses from scratch, including three international health graduate field courses that have been set in Guatemala, Brazil and Kenya.

“I learned to count on Tulane's Innovative Learning Center and their enthusiastic staff and resources, especially for innovative computer-based technologies,” Murphy says.

She has explored using technology to improve the learning experience, including the

use of Tablet PCs and Blackboard course video websites, and new media for student projects. But Murphy also believes it's important to get students out of the traditional classroom, taking them into the field to apply theoretical learning to real-life settings. Students respond enthusiastically.

“Students often tell me they choose Tulane because we offer these field courses,” Murphy says.