

# PROCEDURES OF THE TEACHING AWARDS COMMITTEE

SUMMER 2008

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## 1. OBJECTIVES

The main activities of the Teaching Awards Committee (TAC) are

- (i) the preparation of teaching award nominations for college and campus teaching competitions,
- (ii) selection of finalists for departmental teaching awards, and
- (iii) supervision of the TA Teaching Awards Committee (TATAC).

The committee can expand its mission beyond these activities if it so chooses. For example, it might choose to enter faculty in award competitions sponsored by the American Mathematical Society or other professional organizations.

## 2. COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE

The TAC generally has three or four faculty members, a graduate student and two undergraduates. The faculty members are appointed by the EC. It has been traditional in recent years to invite the Director of Undergraduate Studies and the Associate Chair to participate as nonvoting members of the committee. The designated chair of the TAC is responsible for finding the student members. The Directors of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies can make suggestions of suitable candidates for student members of the committee.

The division of labor is at the discretion of the committee chair, but generally the faculty members are placed in charge of writing the cases. The students (along with the faculty) help to select the cases to pursue and may help with the collection of materials for a case. (Additional suggestions for student tasks will be made in later sections of this document.)

### 3. TIMELINE

The TAC should begin its fall activities by late September or early October. Final written nominations are due in the college office (usually) in the first week of January. Sandee Moore should have a copy of the Provost's Memo on Campus Awards which can also be found on the Provost's website:

<http://www.provost.uiuc.edu/programs/awards/instruction.html>

The LAS Memo on College Awards can be found on the LAS website:

<http://www.las.uiuc.edu/faculty/awards/>

These memos indicate the precise deadlines. Nominations are submitted to the college. If successful in the college competition, they are sent on to compete at the campus level.

Each nomination must be accompanied by letters of recommendation written by former students. These letters must be requested early enough so that the students have time to get them to the committee before the deadline. In addition, it is useful to observe nominees in the classroom since this will sometimes help in the writing of a case. And each of these activities must be preceded by the collection of nomination materials so that the cases to be pursued can be selected in an objective manner.

In the past, the TAC has done the majority of its work (i.e. the writing of the cases) during December, and especially during Christmas break. If the TAC wishes to have the cases written before this, additional time must be allowed.

The TAC should begin its spring activities within the first few weeks of the spring semester. The departmental teaching award winners should be selected by March 1, so that the information can be communicated to the Provost's office in time for recognition of the winners at the Campus Celebration of Teaching Excellence, and so that the information is available in time for the department's April Awards Ceremony.

The TATAC meets during the spring semester. The TAC is responsible for making sure that this committee is formed and carries out its selection of TA winners in a timely fashion (see section 6).

### 4. COLLEGE AND CAMPUS TEACHING COMPETITIONS

#### 4.1. Selection of Nominees.

4.1.1. *Teaching Assistants.* The TATAC selects up to four graduate students each year to receive a departmental TA teaching Award (see section 6). The TAC typically prepares a teaching award nomination each year for one of the past winners of the departmental TA award. (This is not a hard and fast rule, but does reflect some of the tradition of the committee.) Lori Dick in the graduate office will have a list of past winners who are still students in the department. Once the pool of students is known, it is important to collect information from each candidate concerning their teaching. The information should include those matters listed in the Provost's memo as this is what must be stressed in building a case. If the student already has a teaching portfolio on file, that may suffice for the purposes of selecting a nominee. Once the information has been collected for all students, the committee selects one student and proceeds to build a case.

4.1.2. *Faculty.* The TAC should select a faculty nominee by criteria of its choosing. Often the criteria are dictated by the points that must be emphasized in the building of a case (as listed in the Provost's Memo). As of 2007–2008, departmental teaching awards are given to tenured and tenure-track faculty each spring (see section 5). Prior winners of these awards

form a natural pool of candidates. Other suggestions include soliciting nominations from faculty and students (via a Memo announcing the awards competition), and reviewing past and present nominations by students that have been received electronically (see section 7.2). The committee may suggest that faculty announce the existence of the electronic nomination website in their classes, although this raises concerns about the integrity of the process, especially if students feel pressured to nominate their own instructor. Alternatively, the TAC could send out an e-mail notice to all math majors informing them of the existence of this website and the importance of nominations.

Once a list of potential nominees has been formed, the committee should collect information about the teaching of those faculty for the purposes of selecting a nominee to put forward. When a selection has been made, the building of the case begins.

4.1.3. *Teaching Associates.* The procedure here is the same as for faculty. It should be noted that this category is relatively new and may be meant for teaching associates who have been teaching for many years. As a result, it may be difficult for a math department candidate to compete in this category, especially since our pool of teaching associates is small. Be especially careful with students who were once TAs to base a case for a teaching associate only on the time that they were officially a teaching associate.

4.1.4. *Other Award Categories.* The awards considered above are those for undergraduate instruction. The Provost's Memo additionally lists other awards for which certain faculty might qualify. Teaching innovation, especially involving the use of technology, is one example. There has also been an award in the past for involvement of undergraduates in research. In recent years there has been an award for outstanding teaching by a female instructor. The committee must decide whether it wishes to pursue any of these additional awards, and, if so, how a case might be built.

4.2. **Preparation of Teaching Award Nominations.** There are no firm procedures for building a case other than paying careful attention to the criteria listed in the Provost's memo for each award. The following list suggests some relevant factors which the committee may wish to take into account:

- Classroom visitations help to identify unique teaching styles and methods and give a sense of how the instructor relates to his or her students.
- The person(s) writing the case may wish to set up a time to talk one-on-one with the nominee. This can give extra insight into teaching philosophy, innovations, etc.
- A list of courses taught over a four year period, including titles, enrollments and other information, must be included in a case. The Undergraduate Office can help in generating this information.
- A complete list of ICES scores must accompany each nomination. The nominees must request these lists themselves through Sandee Moore. Allow time for them to arrive. The committee may, in fact, choose to use this information in the process of selecting their nominees since poor ICES scores can have a big influence on a case (unless a special explanation is included).
- Each case may include letters from up to four students. The Provost's office recommends that letters be solicited from both current and former students, including alumni. The committee may ask the nominee for names of former students, but the nominee should not contact any students himself or herself. The committee should add names of its own choice to the list. Letters from alumni who are now professionals can be especially influential.

- The nominee must write a statement of teaching philosophy. The ideas expressed in this statement may be very useful in deciding how to craft a specific case.
- Each case requires a peer review. The committee should select someone to write this review, perhaps based on information that is gathered during the interview process.

The strongest cases are those which are able to integrate the various elements listed above. For example, a peer review that strengthens points in the statement of philosophy can be a strong point. It is useful to have the student letters in hand when writing a case because reference to them can be made in the body of the nomination. They may also give insights into the instructor that don't come out in any other way. The best guide to writing a good case is to read several of the award winning cases from the past. Copies of prior nomination papers are available in the Associate Chair's office. A list of previous department winners of the College and Campus awards can be found on the Faculty Honors webpage at:

[http://www.math.uiuc.edu/People/faculty\\_honors.html](http://www.math.uiuc.edu/People/faculty_honors.html)

It is important to request the student reference letters early, or at the very least to get commitments from students to write letters before they leave campus for the Christmas break. The Provost's memo contains a sample request letter. The undergrads on the committee are sometimes good people to ask for such commitments. The committee should make sure it has contact information (e-mail and phone) for each student who will write a letter of support so that they can be reached over the break. Reminders may be necessary. The committee can solicit more letters than it needs.

## 5. DEPARTMENT TEACHING AWARDS

5.1. **History.** Beginning in the academic year 2007–2008, the department instituted the following departmental teaching awards:

- (i) *Distinguished Teaching Award in Mathematics for Tenured Faculty*
- (ii) *N. Tenney Peck Teaching Award in Mathematics*
- (iii) *Distinguished Teaching Award in Mathematics for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty*

The N. Tenney Peck Teaching Award is funded by an endowment created by former Associate Dean Emily Peck in honor of her husband N. Tenney Peck, a former member of the department. It is given to a tenure-track faculty member. The Distinguished Teaching Award in Mathematics for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty is given to a member of the department's instructional staff (lecturers, instructors and teaching associates), or possibly to one of the department's postdocs. All three awards are based on classroom observation, comments from students, and a written report by the nominees describing their teaching goals.

5.2. **Selection of Nominees.** The TAC should select the winners of these awards in the spring semester. As this is a purely internal department competition, there is no need to prepare detailed cases. However, in view of the likelihood that winners of these awards will be nominated in the college and campus competitions in subsequent years, it is useful to collect relevant information into teaching portfolios to assist in that eventuality. The criteria to be used in the selection of the winners of these awards should coincide with those in the Provost's Memo, with one exception. The Provost's Memo strongly discourages the nomination of tenure-track faculty for the campus teaching awards competition. Some of the criteria mentioned in the Provost's Memo (e.g., "Other contributions to improved instruction, such as developing courses and curricula, mentoring graduate teaching assistants, leading workshops on pedagogy, and advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning") may be less relevant for tenure-track faculty, in view of their short length of service at UIUC. It may

be more useful to view the N. Tenney Peck award as an indication of excellent teaching in the short term, with promise for future contributions of the sort emphasized in the campuswide competition.

## 6. SUPERVISION OF THE TA TEACHING AWARDS COMMITTEE

The TA Teaching Awards Committee is responsible for conducting the department awards competition for TA's. This activity traditionally takes place during the spring semester and should be completed by March 1. It is the responsibility of the TAC to select a chair for the TATAC and to ensure that the TATAC conducts its competition in a timely fashion. The chair is typically recruited from past winners of the TA award, often from the winners in the previous year. The TATAC has a rich tradition as a TA-run committee that should be maintained. Lori Dick has the records and description of procedures for the TATAC committee and the new chair of that committee should obtain the records from her. It is worth noting that (as of 2004) the TATAC is expected to choose up to four winners. The funding for these awards comes from the H. R. Brahana Math Prizes fund (for the first two winners), and from the College of LAS (for any remaining winners). The TATAC should conduct its competition as soon as is feasible in the spring semester, as emphasized in section 3. The TATAC requires two faculty participants. The chair of the TAC should help in finding these two members.

## 7. MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

**7.1. Teaching Portfolios.** For each case that the TAC examines (i.e., all prospective nominees, not just those nominated by the committee), a file should be prepared containing the information collected. These teaching portfolios help to simplify the task of collecting information repeatedly on a given faculty member or student. If a portfolio for a person is already in place, new information can simply be added to it. When a person is being considered for a nomination and a portfolio is available, the committee should examine the information it contains and ask for updates if the information is out of date. For example, a list of ICES scores or a statement of teaching philosophy from the previous year should suffice in the decision making for selecting a nominee, although this information should be updated if the person is actually nominated and a case is to be built.

The chair of the TATAC should prepare portfolios for winners of the TA awards in a given year so that this information will be available for the TAC committee the following year.

**7.2. Electronic Nominations.** The department maintains an electronic nomination form at

<http://www.math.uiuc.edu/TAC>

Typically submissions from that form are sent via e-mail to the current chair of the TAC. The current chair of the TAC should contact the department's webmaster early in the fall to arrange for these nomination forms to be directed to his or her e-mail account. It is important at the end of the committee's life that all electronic submissions be collected together in some hard copy form for the use of future committees. These lists are a valuable source of names of letter writers for nominees, and it is hoped that they will continue to accumulate in the future years of the committee.

The department also has an awards nomination poster that appears on various bulletin boards. Tori should have an electronic copy. A new version could be produced if desired for future advertising.