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TO THE POINT: Rutgers math professor named New Jersey Professor of the Year

NEW BRUNSWICK/PISCATAWAY, N.J. -- Rutgers math professor Stephen Greenfield has been named the 2004 New Jersey Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE).

Greenfield, who has been teaching at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, for 35 years, joins professors from other states who were each honored for their dedication to undergraduate teaching. Greenfield's achievements included tailoring math courses for students in liberal arts, business, and life sciences; preparing web-based texts and exercises; and creating courses on recently discovered mathematical knowledge.

Greenfield was selected for this annual award by Carnegie Foundation and CASE panels that included professors, deans, education writers, students, and representatives from government, educational foundations and associations.

"A shared value of great universities is quality teaching, and Professor Greenfield exemplifies this value at Rutgers," said Philip Furmanski, executive vice president for academic affairs. "He and our many professors like him are dedicated to giving students the best education possible by setting high standards, sharing the latest knowledge, and taking personal interest in the success of their students."

Greenfield says he is energized and inspired by his students, who, in addition to Rutgers undergraduate and graduate students, include high school students in the Governor's School of Engineering and Technology summer program. Over the years, he has seen an increase in the diversity of these students and a broadening of material he has to convey.

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“Rutgers has grown into a university that reflects the amazing economic and ethnic diversity of New Jersey,” said Greenfield. “Many of my students are the first in their families to attend college. Others are not of traditional college age. This increases the challenge of teaching, but at the same time it makes teaching more interesting.”

Taking advantage of this diversity, he has asked students in a course he created on mathematics in communication to report on information privacy laws in the countries they or their ancestors came from.

“This has sparked engaging classroom discussions, and has led to a greater appreciation for the role that mathematics plays in securing credit card transactions, medical records and electronic voting,” he said. “With the pervasiveness of the Internet and all the amazing things we plug into it, I find it a lot easier to convince students today that math is relevant to them.”

Greenfield also credited the strong research environment at Rutgers for inspiring his teaching. “I can’t imagine creating and teaching a course on new mathematical knowledge at a school without our research strength,” he said. “I do research that affects my teaching, and I have smart, hard-working colleagues who share their knowledge freely. Teaching and research are inseparable; they support each other.”

A major part of effective teaching, Greenfield noted, involves work outside the classroom. “Scientific and technical knowledge changes rapidly these days, even at the level that undergraduates study,” he said. “So I supplement textbooks with up-to-date reference material on the web, and I apply technology in the classroom that lets students do calculations that would be impossible to do by hand.”

Greenfield said his rewards come from colleagues who reuse material he’s developed and students who say that his teaching has helped them in graduate school or the workforce. “That’s the nicest tribute,” he said, “to know you’re one small stream in the great river of instruction.”

