

Distinguished Teaching Award

Scott Hauck

By Hannah Hickey
News & Information

The Distinguished Teaching Award has come home to roost. Fifteen years ago, Computer Science Professors Gaetano Borriello and Carl Ebeling won after they launched the department's first computer engineering teaching lab. This year, a former student of theirs receives the same honor.

"Most of what I do now are things that I learned from them," says Scott Hauck, now a professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering.

In 1995, as his advisers accepted their award, Hauck completed his doctorate and left for Chicago to accept a faculty position at Northwestern University. But he and his wife left their hearts in Seattle, and when a position at the UW came open in 1999, he applied.

Hauck is now in Electrical Engineering (the switch, he jokes, may help him avoid being treated like a student). He still collaborates with his former advisers and works to forge closer ties between the two departments.

He has already garnered teaching awards from Northwestern University, his department and the College of Engineering. "Our students are fortunate to be brought into the technical intricacies by such an organized, careful, affable and inspiring teacher," writes nominator John Sahr, associate dean of Undergraduate Academic Affairs.

Central to Hauck's teaching philosophy is his belief that engineering is learned by doing.

Walk into Hauck's circuit design class and you may find students playing with a jumble of wooden alphabet blocks connected by kite string. This is not an icebreaker exercise. In fact, students are exploring how to split an electrical circuit while cutting the minimum number of wires.

Every one of Hauck's undergraduate classes begins with an "eye-opener" exercise. At the beginning of the quarter students can download the slides for the entire class so they know what to expect. Then they can bring the partially completed slides to class, so instead of frantically taking notes they can complete problems or ask questions.

"His teaching style is organized and yet completely flexible," writes undergraduate Kaitlyn Chen. "Sitting in Professor Hauck's



class is absolutely an honor."

She is just one of many students and colleagues who offered glowing praise in their nomination letters.

Most telling, perhaps, are the anonymous comments that students have written in course evaluations.

Here is a sampling: "The class I looked forward to the most"; "I can't believe how much I learned"; "Best teacher I have ever had"; "Best instructor ever!" "Professor was able to keep me awake at 8:30 AM"; "I was dreading this class thinking I was going to die, and it turned out to be my favorite class"; "Excellent lectures, review sessions clever"; and "All classes should be modeled after your 271 and 471 classes." "More Haucks," writes one student, who suggests cloning.

Hauck learns the name of every student, no matter how big the class. Another

trick, which he says he learned just a few years ago from Ebeling, is to keep an oversized notepad to use in office hours. Instead of writing on a board he works through a problem on the notepad and afterward he tears off the page and gives it to the student.

Whether he's answering questions, supporting undergraduate research or showing concern for individual students' careers, Hauck has had a profound effect in and out of the classroom. How does he do it all? Hauck holds a workshop for new faculty called "The Time Management Freak Show," explaining how he manages to juggle teaching and research, as well as mentoring new faculty and taking on administrative duties. The key, he says, is to arrange your schedule so as to keep blocks open at the times you naturally focus the best.

"Scott has worked to improve not just his own teaching, but also that of the entire department," writes Leung Tsang, the chair of Electrical Engineering. Hauck has also shared his techniques more broadly, publishing four academic articles on engineering education software and techniques.

While he believes anyone can learn to be a good teacher, there is one credential that Hauck was born with: a booming voice that can be heard at the back of the lecture hall.

"My son is really loud, and asks questions all the time," Hauck says. "And my mom delights in that – she says I was just the same way."

More Haucks. Maybe the students will get their wish after all.