

2003 Recipients of the Rutgers Award for Programmatic Excellence in Undergraduate Education

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Rutgers recognizes the importance of nurturing communities of learning by presenting the annual Award for Programmatic Excellence in Undergraduate Education. Winners set the standard for the ideal undergraduate experience, offering an unparalleled setting for personal growth and fostering active learning where students and faculty are partners. The departments and programs that receive these awards have created a special environment where minds meet and the exceptional is the rule.



'03

Award Winner

Department of Animal Sciences Rutgers–New Brunswick



With its rolling green pastures, rustic barns, and miles of weathered fencing, the working farm on the Cook campus provides the Department of Animal Sciences with a tangible, picturesque learning community. But this bucolic setting would be nothing more than a collection of stables, paddocks, and buildings without the drive and devotion of the scholars who have nurtured a living laboratory there. “Our compassion for animals gives faculty and students the same world-view,” says Larry Katz, the department’s chair.

Animals inspire the devotion; the drive is fired by a commitment to a 140-year-old mission that remains relevant today—the land-grant college’s responsibility to integrate teaching, research, and service for the advancement of science and the solution of problems in agriculture and related industries. By crafting an undergraduate program based on close faculty mentorship and hands-on learning experiences, the department has forged “shoulder-to-shoulder discovery,” as Katz calls it, that inspires critical thinking and independent inquiry.

All faculty members advise the program’s 350 undergraduates, with each student assigned to a professor based on academic strength and area of study. These faculty-student relationships deepen in the barn, where they care for animals together; the laboratory, where they conduct research together; and at campus hangouts, “where they study and socialize together,” says Katz. The department requires 9 credits of experiential learning—triple the Cook College

“The best teachers are the ones who inspire students to find their own strengths.”

—Prof. Larry Katz

standard—and offers independent research, practicum courses, and cooperative education placements that allow students to assist the keepers at major city zoos, train with veterinarians in clinics and hospitals, nurse sick foals at a medical center for horses, or conduct research in biotech/pharmaceutical industry laboratories.

The success of this approach is confirmed by the review committee of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which termed the undergraduate curriculum one of “the real strengths” of the department and found its students “articulate,” “focused,” and “enthusiastic.”

'03

Award Winner

Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice Rutgers–Camden



Finding common ground among the members of one academic unit is difficult enough—now imagine the challenge faced by a department encompassing three related but disparate disciplines. The Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice at Rutgers–Camden works together as a seamless unit—first, by concentrating its curriculum on a key set of common skills; and second, by creating an online learning community that cuts across disciplines while binding together 250 undergraduate majors, many of whom are commuter and nontraditional students. “The three fields have become integral parts that comprise a whole,” says Robert E. Wood, the department’s chair.

All three disciplines share a set of skills essential to social research: the ability “to ask the right questions, collect the right data, and draw the right conclusions,” Wood explains. Because these basic analytical and technical skills are transferable to the workplace, students raise not only their academic rigor, but also their professional prospects. For example, MicroCase, a statistical analysis software program, has been incorporated across the curriculum. Students use the software to complete course work and conduct research using complex statistical databases. Maximizing these core skills melds liberal arts education with targeted career preparation.

“I credit my enriched learning experience to the pioneering union of traditional education and the electronic age.”

—Kristi Napoleon '04

The department backs this skills-based curriculum with an extensive web site that averages up to 42,000 hits per month. The departmental home page offers nuts-and-bolts information like faculty contact numbers, advising FAQs, and course materials. The groundbreaking web-enhanced curriculum has a virtual abundance of instructional and research resources, from software programs to streaming audio and video presentations, to guidelines on developing citations, tables, and graphs for scholarly papers. “The combination of hands-on research tools linked to a vast database, customized virtual tours of the Internet, and an electronic course-management program immersed me in state-of-the-art pedagogy,” says recent graduate Chaz Molins.

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For additional information or instructions on nomination procedures, please contact the Office of the Vice President for Undergraduate Education, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 18 Bishop Place, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8530, 732/932-1644. Nomination forms and instructions can be obtained electronically by following the links provided on the office's web site at <http://undergrad.rutgers.edu>.

