

Hats Off to 2007's Top Teachers

Academic divisions honor their own with Alumni Association Excellence in Teaching Awards

*By Contributing Writers
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WHITING SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING

Hedy Alavi, Geography and Environmental Engineering

When the subject is teaching skills, Hedy Alavi gets high marks from the undergraduate and graduate students he instructs and from his colleagues in the Whiting School's Department of Geography and Environmental Engineering.

They point to the field trips he arranges to show how textbook theories work in real-world environmental applications. They also mention the extra attention and encouragement he provides to students who need help with the demanding curriculum.

Alavi's efforts received even wider recognition recently when he was named this year's recipient of the Johns Hopkins Alumni Association Excellence in Teaching Award.

"Dr. Alavi's teaching style is challenging, entertaining, engaging," wrote one student in a letter of support. "Above all, you leave each class looking forward to the next week. If there is any professor deserving of this award, Dr. Alavi is it."

Another student described Alavi as "very accessible and helpful." When the class was assigned to prepare reports, the student recalled, Alavi opened his personal library as an additional source of material.

Several alumni and faculty colleagues also submitted letters of endorsement for Alavi's teaching award.

"A more dedicated instructor you cannot find," one professor wrote. "Students in his class practically worship him. He conveys a dizzying array of breadth in his course Introduction to Environmental Engineering without sacrificing depth and key fundamentals. He also provides an education in engineering practice through his engagement



Hedy Alavi, Engineering
Photo by Will Kirk / HIPS

of students in field trips and team projects. You hear their appreciation of him every time they mention his name."

Alavi responds humbly to the recognition. "I'm not doing anything unusual," he said. "I'm just an average instructor. I was truly honored to be mentioned with the other faculty members who were also nominated."

Before joining the Johns Hopkins faculty in 1996, Alavi, an expert in hazardous and solid waste engineering, was a Maryland Department of the Environment administrator.

Today, he wears several hats within the Whiting School. He chairs the graduate Environmental Engineering, Science and Management Program in the school's Engineering and Applied Science Programs for Professionals. He also serves as assistant to the dean for international programs, helping the school establish research and academic collaborations with universities and industries in other nations.

But his work directly with students remains a top priority. "I try to devote individual attention to the students and not just consider them as a class," Alavi said. "When my students miss classes or I notice that they're not doing well in their homework, I'll call them into my office and encourage them to work harder and catch up."

Alavi plans to demonstrate his own dedication to environmental awareness. He said he will donate the monetary prize that comes with his teaching award to the "green roof" project under way on the Homewood campus. — *Phil Sneiderman*