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TO: Academic Senate

FROM: Mike Geringer, Chair, Distinguished Teaching Award Committee, 2008-2009

RE: Report for Winter Quarter, 2009, of the Distinguished Teaching Award Committee of the Academic Senate

The bulk of the Distinguished Teaching Award (DTA) committee's work happens in Winter and Spring quarters in the form of individual visitation of each of the committee members to the classes of each of the award finalists, so we met once as a committee during Winter quarter, on Friday, January 9, 2009.

The Fall Quarter 2008 nomination process for the DTA award encountered problems due to the nomination website page link being non-operational for a period of time, as well as reported confusion between the simultaneous marketing of the Distinguished Scholarship Award and the Distinguished Teaching Award. Nevertheless, committee members diligently read and evaluated each of the nominees during the holiday break. Each member also prepared his or her own tentative categorization of candidates based on their perception of the most deserving candidates, in order to facilitate discussion of the large pool of nominees during our meeting.

During the DTA committee's meeting, we spent much time discussing candidates and were able to reach consensus on a list of 8 Finalists that we felt evidenced superior merit for the award. Chairperson Geringer then contacted each of the Finalists, congratulating them on being a Finalist, advising them of the timeline and guidelines for the award review process, and specifying materials that the Finalist would need to provide to the committee members in order to allow the process to move forward. All but one of the Finalists agreed to participate in the process.

Materials were received from the seven participating Finalists by the deadline of January 30. All of the Finalists were teaching during Winter quarter, so we had the opportunity to visit each of these Finalists during the present quarter. I have contacted all Finalists with information requests for Spring quarter teaching activities. Several Finalists contacted Chairperson Geringer or our talented and helpful Senate administrator, Gladys Gregory, with questions regarding the DTA process, and these queries were resolved in a timely manner.

Visitations to classes of the Finalists commenced on Monday, February 2. A few changes in classroom visitation schedules have occurred due to course and instructor factors, but overall there have been no reports of significant difficulties with the classroom visitation and evaluation process. However, various committee members did report difficulties accommodating the required classroom visitations with their other personal and professional commitments, which suggests the need to place extra emphasis on ensuring the requisite number and variety of course visitations during Spring Quarter.

Unfortunately, it is with great sadness that I report that one of our members (Professor Thomas Ruehr) passed away unexpectedly late in 2008. Tom had been an active, insightful, and highly valued member of the DTA committee over the past 25 years, and his presence is greatly missed. The campus community has lost an outstanding teacher and scholar, and our condolences are extended to Tom's wife and family. In large part due to timing of this loss, we were not able to replace Professor Ruehr on the committee and we have proceeded as a body of 5 faculty and 2 ASI student representatives.

This year we wish to consider whether modifications to the committee's criteria and processes should be considered. However, with the exception of Chair Geringer, none of the committee members have previously served on this committee. This constrains detailed, knowledgeable debate on the desirability and nature of any potential modifications. Therefore, consideration of changes is being delayed until the members have had the opportunity to personally experience the process.

One innovation we are considering, at the suggestion of a prior award winner, is to establish a new DTA-based feature on the Senate's website. This site, as currently envisioned, would include brief biographical information and a photo for each of the prior DTA recipients, similar to what is done at other institutions such as Berkeley. The notion is that such a site would help to further recognize prior DTA recipients for their instructional excellence, and perhaps increase the visibility of the award. We expect a decision on whether and how to proceed on this initiative by early in Spring quarter, 2009.

The committee will be continuing visitations through the first five weeks of Spring Quarter, before beginning deliberations regarding selection of recommended recipients of the 2008-2009 Distinguished Teaching Award.